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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

January 1990
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Edward Woodward
(see page 76)

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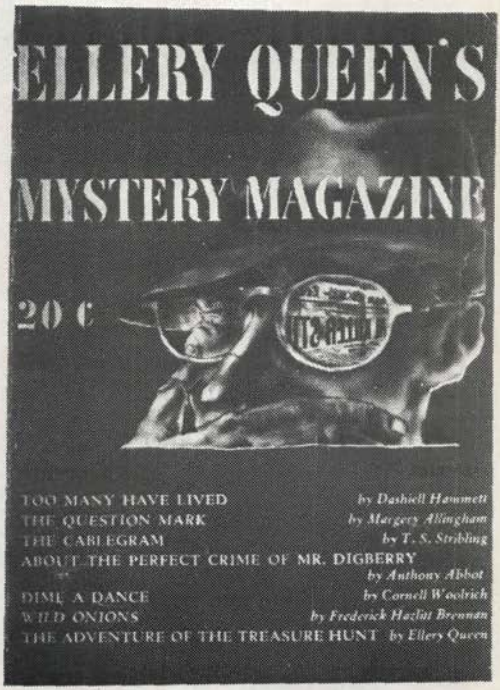
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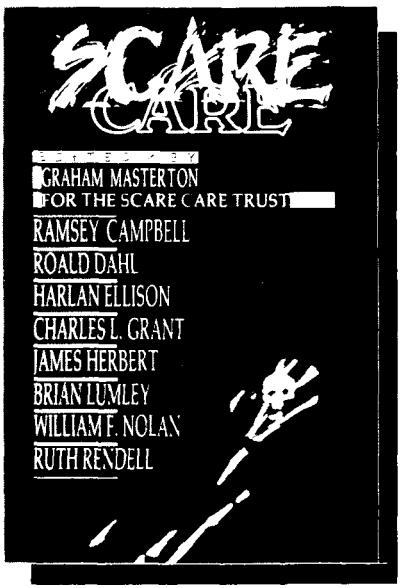

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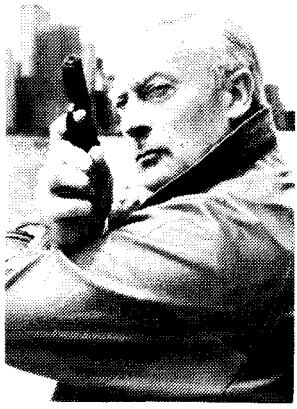

On our cover is EDWARD WOODWARD as The Equalizer

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Note: indicia on page 159

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a *NEW* Ben Snow story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

Picture it, as Sophie on Golden Girls *would say: Eighteen eighty-seven, Arrow Junction, New Mexico. As Ben Snow crosses the shallow creek that borders the southern part of town, leading his lame horse in the pre-dawn light, a man steps from between two adobe houses, raises a long-barreled six-shooter, and cocks the weapon . . .*

THE TRIAL OF BEN SNOW

by EDWARD D. HOCH

Ben Snow had ridden all night under a starless sky to reach the town of Arrow Junction before the storm broke. When his horse Oats developed a bruised hoof near the end of the journey, he was forced to dismount and walk the last two miles, leading Oats by the reins. It was still a half hour before sunrise when he reached the outskirts of Arrow Junction, but there was enough light in the eastern sky for him to make his way easily across the shallow creek that formed the southern boundary of the town. Up ahead, a flock of birds flew from the trees by some adobe houses and off in the distance he could see lightning playing among the mountaintops. From the direction of the wind, he judged that the storm would pass south of the town, missing it completely.

His mind was on the storm and the wind direction and Oats's bruised hoof, so he didn't immediately notice the tall slim man who stepped from between two of the adobe houses in the faint dawn light. It wasn't until the man's hand moved to his holster and came up fast with a long-barreled six-shooter that Ben saw him. He heard the click as the weapon was cocked and waited for nothing more. His own gun cleared the holster in a fraction of a second and he fired once without consciously taking aim.

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The tall man stumbled and went down without a word, his finger squeezing off a shot into the ground as he fell. Ben walked over and looked down at the body, wishing he'd had time for a better aim—his reflexes had reacted to a death threat and he'd shot to kill. The bullet had drilled a hole through the center of the man's chest. He died without speaking, as Ben stood over him. His expression was one of surprise more than of pain.

Ben put away his gun and looked around for help. That was when he saw the man on horseback some distance down the road, covering him with a carbine. "Raise your hands, mister!" the man shouted.

Ben did as he was told. He had no intention of killing anyone else if it could be avoided. As the horseman rode closer, keeping the carbine pointed at Ben, he said, "Don't make a move or you're a dead man."

"I'm not moving. Did you see what happened? He drew on me for no reason."

The man was close enough now so Ben could see the silver star in a circle pinned to his cowhide vest. "That's for a jury to decide, mister. I'm Deputy Hank Lawson and you're under arrest. Unbuckle your gun belt nice and easy."

"This man was—"

"This man was the sheriff, mister. You just killed Sheriff Wendy Sloane."

The jail at Arrow Junction contained only three cells. One was occupied by a bearded man sleeping beneath an army blanket. Hank Lawson locked Ben into the middle one, to the left of the sleeping man. "Do I get to have a lawyer?" Ben asked.

"That's why I gave you the middle cell. Best lawyer in town's sleepin' right next to you."

"Oh?"

"Tom Kirkpatrick's his name. He drinks too much, but he's a good smart attorney. Don't worry, mister, we'll give you a fair trial before we string you up."

"Thanks."

Lawson sat down at the desk about ten feet away and started to file a report. "You say your name is Ben Snow?"

"That's right."

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-eight. I was born in eighteen fifty-nine."

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"Kinda fast with a gun, aren't you? Been in trouble with the law before?"

"I've killed a couple of people in self-defense."

"That what you claim in this case?"

Ben nodded. "Absolutely."

"Didn't you know he was the sheriff? He was wearing his badge."

"I never saw it. It was still dark."

"We get occasional Injuns coming across the creek in the morning to steal what they can. He went down there sometimes to catch 'em at it."

"And kill them? Did he like killing Indians?"

Hank Lawson walked over to the bars that separated them. "You just button your lip, mister. I'm sending a rider to Taos for the U.S. marshal. He'll take care of you. Don't go away now—I gotta see the widow and start making funeral arrangements."

He locked the inner door and then let himself out the front of the building. Ben took out his pocket watch and saw that it wasn't yet eight o'clock. He sat down on the cot and thought about the bad luck that had brought him to Arrow Junction. It had been a trick of fate, really, caused more by the impending storm than anything else. He'd helped drive a herd of Texas longhorns to the railroad siding for shipment back East, then headed west on his own into the New Mexico territory.

He should have known from the beginning it was a mistake. New Mexico was the territory of Billy the Kid, who'd died there only six years earlier. Ben had been mistaken for Billy more than once, because their ages were the same and both were lightning-fast with a gun. Even after Billy's death, some still thought he was alive and saw him in the way Ben handled a six-gun.

Perhaps that was what Sheriff Wendy Sloane had seen just before he died.

Immediately Ben shook his head, clearing the thought away. Sheriff Sloane had drawn first, before he saw the speed of Ben's draw. Whatever had happened out there, it had nothing to do with Billy the Kid.

"What time is it?" a thick, sleepy voice asked from the next cell.

"Just about eight in the morning."

Tom Kirkpatrick sat up on his cot and scratched his beard. He tossed the blanket aside and Ben saw that he was dressed in striped pants and a sort of grey frock coat. The lawyer worked his jaw up

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and down as if trying to free it from the grit and glue of an unpleasant night. Finally he stood up and stretched.

"Lawson says you're a pretty good lawyer," Ben said.

"The best within a day's ride."

"Will you defend me?"

"Depends on what you did."

"They say I killed Sheriff Sloane."

"My God!" Kirkpatrick sat back down on his cot. "Bring me a drink!"

"I was just coming into town and suddenly there he was, right in front of me. He drew on me and I fired in self-defense."

The bearded lawyer moistened his lips. "What's your name, stranger?"

"Ben Snow."

"So somebody finally outdrew old Wendy Sloane! I never thought it would happen."

"Will you take the case?"

"First tell me everything that happened. Then I'll try to get Lawson to let me outta here. I can't prepare a case sittin' behind bars."

Hank Lawson returned within the hour and unlocked the lawyer's cell door. "You behave yourself next time, Tom," he cautioned. "If I'm to be the new sheriff around here, I won't be as easy on you as Wendy was."

"What about me?" Ben asked. "Don't I have a hearing before a judge?"

"The marshal just rode in from Taos. He'll be talkin' to you soon."

Marshal Dave Azure was a grim-faced man with a jaw that might have been chiseled out of granite. His eyes were as blue as the sky on a spring afternoon, and as hard as the metal of his six-shooter. He stood close to the bars as he spoke with Ben. "You're lucky this is a law-abiding community, Mr. Snow. We don't lynch folks around here, even when they gun down the sheriff. You'll get a fair trial."

"That's all I ask. I want to prove it was self-defense. Mr. Kirkpatrick here is my lawyer."

Marshal Azure didn't glance at the bearded man. "Do you have any additional statement besides what you gave the deputy?"

"That's it. He never identified himself as the sheriff—in fact, he said nothing at all, he just drew on me."

"Odd time to be arriving in town, before sunrise."

"I was trying to beat the storm."

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"The storm was south of here."

"I thought I was right in its path." Suddenly Ben remembered Oats. "Look, my horse has a bruised hoof—is there a blacksmith or a veterinarian who can take a look at it?"

Azure nodded. "I'll have the deputy look after it."

Tom Kirkpatrick adjusted his rumpled coat. "How long do we have to prepare for trial, Marshal?"

"It starts tomorrow morning at ten o'clock. That's when the judge gets here."

"Doesn't give me much time to prepare a case."

The marshal shrugged. "The case is pretty open and shut. Snow doesn't deny killing him."

Kirkpatrick and Azure left together. The lawyer paused long enough to wink back at him, but Ben needed more than a wink to lift his spirits.

Toward noon he had another visitor. Hank Lawson came through the inner door first, as if to prepare the way. "Uh, Snow—the sheriff's widow wants to see you."

"I don't think that would be wise," Ben said. He was hardly in the mood for a tearful scene, and he didn't want this woman he'd never known tearing apart the skimpy fabric of his justification for killing her husband.

"She wants to see you, Snow. It's the least you can do."

Lawson held open the door and a slim, handsome woman in her thirties entered. She wore a long black mourning dress that did little to hide the curves of her body. The deputy cleared his throat. "Uh, this is Katherine Sloane, the sheriff's wife. Widow."

She stepped up to the bars until her face was only inches from Ben's. "Are you the man who killed my husband?"

"Yes. But—"

"Thank you," she said, her voice no louder than a whisper. Then she turned and walked out.

In the late afternoon, Tom Kirkpatrick returned. His earlier confidence seemed to have all but evaporated as he pulled up a stool by Ben's cell and lit a little Mexican cigar. "I gotta tell you it doesn't look too good. The judge will be here in the morning and Marshal Azure is going to present the case himself. They figure the whole trial will be over in one day."

"When will they hang me?"

"Well, first they find you guilty, then the judge passes sentence.

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Last time we had a hangin' in Arrow Junction it was the morning after the trial, but I could always try for an appeal to a higher court."

"What are the chances of that?" Ben asked.

"Not too good, I'll admit."

Ben told the lawyer about Katherine Sloane's visit. "She actually thanked me. Maybe she'd testify for me."

"Naw. She led a tough life—everyone knows he used to beat her when he'd been drinking—but that isn't going to help you. It has no bearing on your gunning him down this morning."

"What was he doing there at that hour, anyway? It was almost as if he was laying a trap for someone. And Lawson was there, too, remember, just down the street."

"Lawson says they were patroling, looking for renegade Indians who sneak into town to rob folks."

"I don't look like a redskin. Why did he draw on me?"

"Beats me," Kirkpatrick said.

"Have you talked to any potential witnesses out there? Somebody must live in those adobe houses."

"Yeah, I been thinking the same thing. It might be worth a ride out to find out if anybody saw the shooting."

"I'm counting on you," Ben told him. "I can't do much from a jail cell."

The lawyer squinted at him. "You got money, in case I have to pay a few people?"

"What sort of people?"

"Some folks are better witnesses if you can slip them a few dollars."

"I have a little money," Ben admitted. If it would keep him from the hangman's noose, he was willing to try anything.

After Kirkpatrick left, Hank Lawson wandered in again. "I'll bring you supper around six," he said. "You're the only prisoner I got, so I go get it at the tavern."

"When's the sheriff's funeral?" Ben asked.

"Day after tomorrow. That might be a break for you. They might postpone the hangin' till he's in the ground."

Ben started thinking seriously about a way to escape.

Kirkpatrick reappeared while Ben was eating supper. He was red-faced and agitated. "There's been another killing," he told Hank Lawson.

"What?" The deputy almost dropped his coffee cup.

"Pedro Fernandez, the assayer. He lived in one of those houses

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near where the sheriff was killed. I went to question him and found his body. He'd been dead about an hour, shot in the back."

"I'll be damned!"

"I reported it to the marshal," Kirkpatrick said. "He and Doc Lewis are on their way out now."

Lawson clearly wanted to be there, too, but he was reluctant to go. "I can't leave you alone with the prisoner, Tom. You might let him out."

"Don't you know me better than that?"

"I know you too well," the deputy said with a scowl. "The only way I'll leave you two is if you're both locked in cells."

Kirkpatrick laughed and stepped into the empty cell next to Ben's. "Go ahead, lock me up. This place is like a second home to me."

Lawson slammed the cell door shut and turned the key in the lock. "You're the damndest lawyer I ever knew, Tom."

When they were alone in the jailhouse, Ben stopped pacing and sat down on his cot. "Tell me what you know about this murder. Who was Fernandez? Which house was his? Did—"

"Slow down," Kirkpatrick said, putting up his hand. "Here, have one of these cigars."

Ben accepted one through the bars, lit it, and almost choked on the first puff. "If I smoke many of these, they won't have to hang me."

"Fernandez' house is the second one from the creek. He lived there with his wife, but she's back in Mexico right now, visiting her family."

"A hot-blooded beauty with long black hair," Ben mused.

The lawyer laughed. "That's funny. Ellie Fernandez is fifty years old, bow-legged, and ugly as sin."

"Go on."

"Her husband has an assay business down the street, but he doesn't work at it too hard. I haven't seen him in his shop lately. I went out to his house and pounded on the door, figuring he might have seen you and the sheriff draw on each other. When he didn't answer, I looked through the window and saw him on the floor in the kitchen. I climbed through an open window and looked to see if he was alive. The body was still warm, but he was dead. There was dried blood and broken glass, signs of a struggle all over the place."

"How'd you know he was killed an hour earlier?"

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"A clock that got knocked off a table was stopped at four-forty. It was a quarter to six by my pocket watch."

"Who do you think killed him? Did he have any enemies?"

"No. Everyone liked Pedro. He was quiet and hard-working. His wife was the noisy one. I think he was killed because he saw something this morning."

"What could he have seen?"

The lawyer shrugged and leaned back against the bars of his cell. "Maybe somebody else shooting Sheriff Sloane."

Ben thought about Hank Lawson, seated astride his horse with the carbine aimed and ready. Then he shook his head. "I didn't miss."

"Maybe there were two bullets in him. Doc Lewis examined the body—he'll be their first witness in the morning."

"Who else is the marshal calling?"

"Hank Lawson, as an eyewitness. Mrs. Sloane, to identify the body. Those three will probably be all they need."

"Is there any way we can bring the Fernandez killing into it?"

"I don't see how. There's no evidence he was a witness. He was probably asleep."

"Who are you calling for the defense?"

"You. Who else is there?"

"Nobody," Ben admitted.

"Get a good night's sleep tonight. You'll need it."

Presently Hank Lawson returned and let Kirkpatrick out of the cell. "What about the killing?" Ben asked the deputy.

"Probably some injun from across the creek. A renegade who strayed off the reservation. Wouldn't be the first time."

"Was anything stolen?"

"Nothing obvious, but Fernandez often had small amounts of gold and silver around for his business."

That night a few young men gathered outside the jail and shouted, "Lynch him!" The demonstration died down as quickly as it had started. The people of Arrow Junction seemed content to let the court do the job for them.

Ben slept restlessly and awakened around five o'clock, just as the sun was rising. For an instant he didn't remember where he was, but the sight of the bars returned him to reality. Hank Lawson brought him breakfast and allowed him to shave.

"The marshal said to tell you your horse is being treated for his bruised hoof—the blacksmith is soaking it and he'll be good as new."

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"I'm glad to hear it."

"What do you plan to do with the horse if the verdict goes against you?"

"I'll worry about that later."

"I might be willing to buy him off you."

"We'll see." Ben took a swallow of coffee. "What are your feelings toward me, Lawson?" he asked. "Do you want me dead because I killed your boss?"

The deputy thought about it. "I guess not. If I was that anxious to see you dead I probably would have killed you with my carbine yesterday morning. I'd have been a hero."

"Did you know Pedro Fernandez?"

"Everyone knew him. It's a small town."

"Maybe you didn't kill me yesterday because you saw Pedro at his window watching everything."

"I didn't see Pedro at any window. He was probably asleep like everyone else."

Shortly before court was set to convene at ten o'clock, Tom Kirkpatrick arrived in a clean frock coat to accompany Lawson and Ben to the tavern where the trial would take place. The deputy chained Ben with leg irons and handcuffs, ending his thoughts of a dash for freedom on the way.

He was not surprised that the tavern was crowded. Most everyone in town wanted a look at him, and he was certain the same crowd would be assembled for his hanging. Choosing a jury from among the spectators proved to be perfunctory and Kirkpatrick didn't even bother to challenge. "What good would it do? Everyone in town knew the sheriff and nobody knows you."

"Couldn't you get the trial moved to Taos or Santa Fe?"

"That's not the way things are done here. The folks want to see justice right here in Arrow Junction."

The judge was a grey-haired man named Cothcoat, in from Santa Fe. He rapped his gavel with a heavy hand when the spectators broke into spontaneous applause as the jury was seated. Ben looked over the faces of the twelve men who would decide his fate and knew that they'd already reached their verdict.

Marshal Dave Azure explained that he was acting as prosecuting attorney in the absence of the territory's regular prosecutor. Judge Cothcoat gave his approval and the marshal launched into his opening remarks.

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"Gentlemen of the jury, you have before you a very simple, open-and-shut case. The accused, Ben Snow, rode into Arrow Junction early yesterday morning just before sunrise. When your good friend and public servant, Sheriff Wendy Sloane, challenged him, Snow drew his gun and killed the sheriff with a single shot. Why, you may ask? Snow will contend that he fired in self-defense, not seeing the sheriff's badge. The prosecution contends that Ben Snow is a man of unsavory reputation, whose chief claim to fame in this territory is that he can draw a gun as fast as Billy the Kid used to. Well, gentlemen, Billy the Kid rests six feet under ground these days, and that's where I'll ask you to send the defendant, for the willful murder of Sheriff Wendy Sloane!"

He first called Doctor Frederick Lewis to the stand. Lewis, a stout man with thick glasses, was sworn in and took his seat in the witness chair. There was some good-natured banter as some of the jurors called out to him and Judge Cothcoat used his gavel.

Azure strode forward. "Doctor Lewis, did you examine the body of Sheriff Sloane?"

"I did, sir."

"What would you state was the cause of death?"

"A single bullet to the chest, which penetrated the heart. Death would have followed almost instantly, within a minute or so."

"There were no other wounds?"

"None that would have caused death or serious injury. There were some cuts on his palms, which could have happened when he fell."

"But no other bullet wound?"

"No."

"Were you able to recover the bullet from his chest, Doctor?"

"Yes, I was. It had passed through the heart and lodged in the spine."

"What type of bullet was it?"

"The slug was somewhat mashed, but it appeared to be from a .45-caliber weapon."

"What sort of weapon was the accused carrying?"

"A Colt .45."

"Thank you, Doctor."

Tom Kirkpatrick got to his feet slowly to begin cross-examination. "Isn't it true, Doctor Lewis, that Sheriff Sloane himself was carrying a Colt .45?"

"I guess that's so. It's a popular gun around here. But he sure didn't shoot himself."

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That brought some laughter from the spectators and the judge pounded his gavel again. "Order!"

"Wasn't there a second shooting yesterday afternoon, also with a Colt .45?"

"Objection!" Azure was on his feet. "Not relevant."

"When there are two killings in one day with the same type of weapon, your Honor, there could well be a connection," Kirkpatrick argued.

"What sort of connection?"

"If someone else killed the sheriff, they might have returned later to kill a possible witness like Pedro Fernandez."

Azure began to show his exasperation. "Your Honor, the accused has admitted firing the fatal shot. We've heard nothing until now about a second gunman."

"Objection sustained," the judge ruled.

Kirkpatrick's shoulders sagged. "No more questions, your Honor."

Katherine Sloane was called next, solely for the purpose of identifying the victim. "It was my husband, Wendy," she told the jury, dabbing at an imaginary tear. Kirkpatrick did not cross-examine. Ben half expected her to smile at him as she left the stand, but she kept her eyes straight ahead.

The final prosecution witness was Deputy Hank Lawson. He took the oath with the quiet manner Ben had come to expect, then went over the events of the previous morning. "The sheriff had told me he was going to ride out at dawn and check on injuns crossing the creek to cause trouble. I woke up early and decided to ride out there, too, in case something happened that he needed help. I was just riding up when I saw him confront the accused."

"Were they afoot or on horseback?"

"Mr. Snow was leading his horse. He said later it had bruised a hoof. The sheriff was on foot. We found his horse tied to a tree down the road a piece."

"Did you see the shots fired?"

"Yes, sir, I did. Mr. Snow fired first and the sheriff went down. I heard one other shot."

"Did Sloane fire, too?"

"I was pretty certain he had, and when I examined his gun later I found that two cartridges had been fired. The bullets apparently went into the ground."

"Did the accused admit firing the fatal shot?"

"Yes, sir."

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"Was the sheriff wearing his badge at the time of his death?"

"He was, though Mr. Snow maintained the light was too poor for him to have seen it."

Marshal Azure, annoyed at the answer, barked, "Just answer the question, deputy."

"I'm sorry, sir."

"That's all."

Tom Kirkpatrick took his time with the questioning, aware that this was his final chance at cross-examination. Finally he reached the key point. "What would you have done, Deputy Lawson, if you'd suddenly been confronted, in the dimness of early morning, by a man who pointed a pistol at you and cocked the hammer?"

"Objection!" Azure shouted, bounding to his feet.

"Sustained."

Kirkpatrick ended his cross-examination after a few more routine questions and Azure announced that the prosecution rested. Judge Cothcoat looked at his pocket watch and called a recess until after lunch.

Ben told the deputy he wasn't hungry and was allowed to remain in his seat, still in handcuffs and leg irons. "See if you can find Doc Lewis," he told Kirkpatrick. "I've got some questions for him."

While the lawyer went out to locate Lewis, Katherine Sloane reappeared and came over to the table where Ben sat. "I hope they let you off," she told him.

"Can I call you as a defense witness?"

She smiled and shook her head. "I've said enough. I know nothing about what happened yesterday. I know only that I had a hard life with that man and I'm glad it's over."

"Did you know Pedro Fernandez?"

"We all knew him. Wendy used to take him nuggets to test for gold."

"Have you any idea who might have killed him?"

She shook her head. "Do you really think he might have seen what happened?"

"I think so. He might have seen someone else out there."

"But the bullet—"

She was interrupted by the return of Tom Kirkpatrick, with the doctor in tow. Lewis seemed nervous in Ben's presence and asked, "What do you want? I can't do anything to get you off."

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"I just want to ask you a couple of things about the shooting of Fernandez. Was it a shot to the heart, like mine?"

"No, it was in the back. It missed the spine and vital organs but did a lot of damage nevertheless. Fernandez bled to death."

"How long did it take?"

"About an hour, judging from the broken clock in the room."

"But he didn't try to crawl out of the house for help, or leave a message of some sort?"

"He was probably unconscious from the shock of the wound, followed by the loss of blood."

Lewis had talked as much as he was going to. When Ben started to ask another question, he scurried away. "Did that help any?" Kirkpatrick asked.

"It might have. Put me on the stand this afternoon and we'll see."

By the time court reconvened, one of the spectators had managed to get behind the bar and open a bottle of whiskey. Judge Cothcoat ordered the man removed. "This here's a court of law and we're about serious business. The life or death of the accused hangs in the balance. Any more incidents like that and I'll clear out all spectators!"

Things quieted down and Kirkpatrick got to his feet. If nothing else, he was a showman. He walked up and down before the jury, studying their faces, silently appealing to them. Then he turned and called Ben Snow as the only defense witness.

After a few preliminary questions, he asked, "Why did you ride into Arrow Junction just before dawn yesterday morning, Mr. Snow?"

"I'd been traveling in this general direction and a thunderstorm came up to the south. I could see the lightning in the mountains. I kept going all night to outrun the storm, but then it changed direction. I ended up at the creek just before dawn."

"Then what happened?"

"I had just crossed the creek, leading my horse because he was a bit lame, when this man stepped out from between two of the adobe houses."

"Was he wearing a sheriff's badge?"

"I couldn't see it. It was still quite dark."

"Go on."

"He drew his gun without a word and aimed it at me. Everything

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was very quiet that early in the morning and I distinctly heard the click as he cocked the hammer. I knew he meant to shoot me."

"What did you do?"

"I fired in self-defense. I had no choice. It was his life or mine."

"Are you a gunfighter by trade, Mr. Snow?"

"No. I've been a cowhand, a circus worker, and various other things, but never a gunfighter. I use my gun only to defend myself."

"Mr. Snow, what reason would Sheriff Sloane have had for killing you, a perfect stranger he'd never seen before?"

Ben tightened his grip on the arms of the witness chair. He'd fed that question to Kirkpatrick, and now was his big chance, his only chance. "I believe everyone has been looking at yesterday's events backward. I believe, and I think I can prove, that Sheriff Sloane tried to kill me because I saw him coming away from Pedro Fernandez' house just after shooting him."

There was an immediate uproar in the tavern. Some spectators were shouting, "Lynch him!" Others yelled, "Let him talk!" Finally, when it seemed the judge's gavel was about to break, some semblance of order was restored.

"Go on, Mr. Snow," the judge instructed.

"The time of Pedro Fernandez' death was established by a broken clock near the body, stopped at twenty minutes to five. But everyone seems to have forgotten that that time occurs twice each day. The sun rose this morning around five, so twenty to five yesterday morning would have been almost the exact time of my pre-dawn encounter with the sheriff."

"Is there any evidence that Fernandez was shot in the morning rather than the afternoon?" Kirkpatrick asked.

"Yes, there is. I was told by Deputy Lawson that there was dried blood around the body. Since Fernandez bled to death and must have lost a great deal of blood, it would have taken much longer than an hour to dry. Another thing—though I heard no shot as I crossed the creek yesterday morning, a flock of birds flew from the trees near the house. They obviously heard something that I didn't."

Azure was on his feet. "Your Honor, how long must we listen to these theories of the accused?"

"There's more," Ben said hurriedly before the judge could silence him. "There were cuts on the sheriff's palms. You've heard Doc Lewis testify to that. And there was broken glass in the Fernandez house. That was how he cut his hands, during the struggle. It's unlikely

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he did it when he fell, because one palm would have been protected by the pistol he held. Then there's the matter of the two spent cartridges in the sheriff's revolver. He fired only one shot, just after I fired, and Hank Lawson confirmed that. When was the other shot fired? We've heard from Doc Lewis that Fernandez was also killed by a .45-caliber bullet, and Sheriff Sloane carried a Colt .45."

The judge was interested enough to take over the questioning himself now. "Why would Sheriff Sloane murder Pedro Fernandez?"

"Fernandez had examined some nuggets for Sloane, testing them for gold. Perhaps he lied about the results and Sloane found out. He arranged to meet him yesterday morning and accused him of it. There was a fight and the sheriff shot him in the back. He left him for dead, walked out of the adobe house, and then saw me. He was faced with only one option. I had to die, too, and I would have if I hadn't shot first."

"Is there anything else, Mr. Snow?"

"One more thing. If my theory is correct and the sheriff didn't ride out there hunting Indians, then Deputy Lawson didn't need to be there as a backup. I request he be recalled to the witness stand."

Kirkpatrick took his cue and recalled Lawson. The deputy fidgeted in his chair and finally agreed to answer the question. "There was bad blood between the sheriff and Fernandez. It was something about a claim for a silver mine that the sheriff felt Fernandez had cheated him out of. When I heard him tell Fernandez he'd be out to see him early in the morning, I was worried about what it meant. I decided to ride out there so he wouldn't do anything foolish, but I arrived too late. Of course I didn't know Fernandez was dead till yesterday afternoon, and by that time Snow's trial was all set up. I kept quiet because I figured it couldn't help anybody."

"It could have helped the defendant!" Tom Kirkpatrick thundered. "Gentlemen of the jury, I ask that you return a verdict of Not Guilty by reason of self-defense!"

One hour later, the jury did just that.

Ben went with Lawson to pick up Oats at the blacksmith's shop. He was pleased when the man told him, "The hoof has come along fine. You can ride him so long as you don't race him for a couple of days. Just a slow steady pace."

Ben thanked him and turned to Lawson. "I think I'll head down the trail to Taos. Even though the jury acquitted me, it might not be too healthy staying around here."

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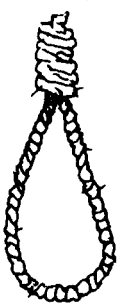
He paused only to say goodbye to Tom Kirkpatrick and pay him for his help. Then, on the way out of town, he saw Katherine Sloane waving to him. He waved back but kept on riding. She only wanted to thank him again and he'd already had her thanks.



DETECTIVERSE

SHE SHOULDN'T HAVE MARRIED HARRY

by FRANCES A. POWELL

Handsome Harry made a gaffe
When he shot his better half.
He forgot to load the gun,
Giving her a chance to run—
Run downstairs and get a knife—
Harry's dead, she's serving life.

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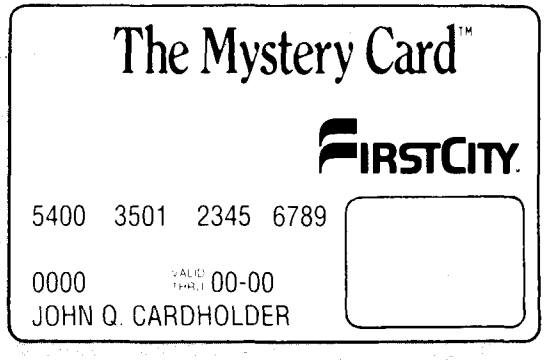

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Mystery

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The business with the reporter took place a week earlier at Green Mountain Inn out in the country. A skinny kid in a corduroy jacket stomped up to their corner table and said, "What a coincidence, Mr. Mayor. This your wife . . . ?"

QUESTIONABLE ASSOCIATIONS

by BOB TIPPEE

The telephone rings twice and quits, meaning Bob wants to meet for dinner. Glenda is writing a letter to her sister Joan, who has everything—and imaginary troubles to match. Lonely people write lots of letters, especially lonely people with three younger sisters who don't get along. Lonely people also never turn down a chance to go to dinner with someone like Bob. So Joan may never receive her letter, not that this one matters.

Glenda expects Bob to try to kill her tonight. She gives it a ninety percent chance. The other ten percent makes her cap her pen, plug in her rollers, and start water running in the tub.

At the prearranged time two hours later, an hour after dusk, Glenda strolls to the darkest corner of the park a block from her apartment. She has no reason to hurry. Bob won't be early. Or late. He's like that. Everything according to plan. Bob doesn't like surprises.

Glenda knows what to expect. Bob will circle the park in his grey Buick until he's certain neither of them was followed. Then he'll let her join him in the front seat. They'll have dinner, probably Italian at Mario's on the edge of town where nobody notices anything. She'll invite him to her apartment for drinks or something, but he'll prefer to drive up Reservoir Hill, where they can look out over the city like they did the first time they went out. And there, on Reservoir Hill where nobody goes, he'll try to kill her.

Unless the odds are wrong. There's always the chance that he'll

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announce that he's tired of it all, that he's ready to leave politics and his wife and move to that place in the Caymans he's always talking about, and to take Glenda with him. The announcement would surprise her. Unlike Bob, Glenda likes surprises. And for lonely people, ten percent is good odds.

She sits on the park bench farthest from the streetlight, splintery wood cooling the backs of her legs, and thinks about Joan. Joan lives in San Diego with her gorgeous husband and three perfect kids and hates her life. Joan envies Laura, another sister, who works for an advertising agency and lives alone in a Manhattan apartment. Glenda happens to know, from Laura's letters, who really pays for the apartment—which isn't in such a great part of town—but promised not to tell Joan or Jamie, the youngest, who takes pictures for a newspaper in Houston and is never home.

Right on time, Bob drives by, not looking up, making his circuit just to be sure.

Glenda wonders what precautions he took before that first time he approached her and announced—oh, so correctly—that she looked like she could use company. Had he cruised the all-night diner inside and out, just to be sure? She had finished her hamburger and fries and wasn't paying attention to anything but the letter she was writing to Jamie, who at the time was trying to decide whether she could make it in Houston. (Glenda always thought it funny that someone as focused and talented as Jamie should always be asking advice from a lonely nobody like her big sister. But she, like Joan and Laura, sent their problems to Glenda by mail, which was cheaper than therapy and made a lonely person feel a little less so in the process.)

Of course then, in the diner, Glenda had no way of knowing about Bob's hugely successful construction business or his political ambitions or his wife. Not that it would have mattered. How many men take interest in a moderately pretty woman on the downside of her marrying years, scribbling on a stationery tablet and licking mustard off her fingers?

In due course, Glenda learned what she needed to know about the business and the politics and the wife and what the newspapers called "questionable associations." She watched the campaigns and victory parties on television and congratulated Bob as best she could when they were together. And now she's past marrying age—easy marrying age, anyway, unless it's Bob.

The Buick stops. Glenda stands up, walks over, opens the door,

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and hesitates. Bob says, "Italian?" She laughs, says, "Sounds great," and gets in.

Bob takes the longest of several long routes to Mario's. There's traffic, so he doesn't kiss her. He doesn't talk much during the ride or dinner. After lasagna he says, "That business with the reporter the last time we were out—I got it cleared up. No reason to worry or say anything to anybody."

The business with the reporter took place a week earlier at Green Mountain Inn out in the country. A skinny kid in a corduroy jacket stomped up to their corner table and said, "What a coincidence, Mr. Mayor. This your wife?" And Glenda could tell he knew she wasn't Bob's wife, like he'd been tipped that the mayor, who was running for governor despite the recently alleged "questionable associations," had a girl friend. Bob introduced Glenda as a freelance speechwriter and said they had work to do and he'd be glad to answer any questions the guy had in the office the next day. When the guy left, Bob told Glenda there was no problem. But he didn't want to go to her apartment afterward, so Glenda knew better.

Now she tells Bob, "I'd almost forgotten about the reporter"—which is a lie. She has worried all week about him. She knows what happened to him. Lonely people have this sense about how rich and powerful people get things done, especially rich and powerful people with questionable associations.

Bob calmly dabs tomato sauce from his chin. He's either working out the details of Glenda's murder—which he'll handle himself for discretion's sake—or wondering how to propose a permanent trip to the Caymans together. It has to be one or the other. A politician can have questionable associations or a girl friend—but not both.

"I thought we might do something different after dinner," he says. "Ride up to Reservoir Hill. Look at the view. Think about the good times we've had these past few years."

Glenda remembers their first ride to Reservoir Hill: a clear, cool night like this, no moon, a world of stars, a gentle breeze, Bob's strong embrace and warm breath against her cheek.

"Good times," she says dreamily.

"I've often wished that it was—" He hesitates.

She rescues him. "Different."

"Yeah, different." And he drops his eyes and bows his head, a man with more on his mind than how to dress for a boring job and what to write to overindulged siblings.

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She won't let herself cry. He needs for her not to cry. His wife must cry too much. So Glenda doesn't cry, she gives him that. She always gives him what she can.

"They've been very good times," she says.

On the ride to Reservoir Hill, Glenda stays close to the door, in case someone is following. When Bob steers onto the lonely, dark service road that winds to the hilltop, she slides next to him and sets her left hand gently on his thigh.

"You don't have to tell me," she says, "but I'm curious. How did you handle that business with the reporter?"

His leg tenses. "You never asked me about business before."

"Your business never had me in the middle of it before."

"Discretion has always been a very important part of our relationship," he says. "Very important."

"As I said, you don't have to tell me. I'm just concerned. I want you to be governor."

He dodges. He's good at that. "I'd have to move to the capital, you know."

"Nothing to keep me here," she says offhandedly. "Unless I was a political problem or something."

He snaps his head toward her. "I'd never turn my back on you like that."

"I'd love you even if you did," she says, meaning it.

"You deserve an explanation," he says. "The reporter's Godfrey Burlington. He digs up dirt on politicians and makes them pay small fortunes to keep it out of print."

He steers through three more turns. The road cuts through a cluster of pines near the top of the hill. "So you paid him off?" Glenda asks.

"What else could I do?"

He might be telling the truth. He might be tired of the hassle and the pressure and the wife with all the problems. Glenda knows all about people like that and how they spread their problems around if you let them.

"It doesn't seem fair," she says.

"Don't worry," Bob says. "Political committees keep money around for stuff like this."

They reach the top of Reservoir Hill. Lights from the city glitter below like stars on a glassy lake. Glenda can't be certain what to

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expect now. She probes. "So somebody on some committee knows about us."

Bob brakes the Buick at the road's end and turns off the engine. "No names, if that's what you mean." He puts his arm around her.

"And the reporter?"

"What difference does it make? I gave him his money this morning. He's happy."

Now she knows. There will be no trip to the Caymans.

Bob pulls her gently toward him, warm, unthreatening. How will he do it? There must be a gun somewhere. Watching even as she reaches for his kiss, she sees his move: the left hand slipping under the car seat, stuffing something into his jacket pocket.

"Let's take a walk," he says, pulling away his right arm, his left hand on the jacket pocket.

Glenda smooths her sweater but doesn't move. "I wrote the darndest letter the other day."

"Seems to me you write a lot of letters."

"To my sister Joan," Glenda says. "The one in San Diego. I told her how clever you were about getting rid of Godfrey Burlington at the restaurant."

"You wrote that in a letter?"

"Don't worry. That's all I wrote to Joan."

Bob rubs his forehead. "You've got to be more careful about things like that."

"I know," Glenda says. "That's why I told the middle part to Laura in New York. About how I had reason to pose as a freelance speechwriter and how I stayed up all night, the night after I had dinner with you, and typed up a phony speech just to make it look real."

"I didn't know you did that," Bob says.

"Pretty good speech, thank you very much." She looks at him. "I told the third part to Jamie in Houston."

"My God! What third part?"

"The part about how I went to the newspaper to show Godfrey Burlington my speech, to prove your story, and how the people there said he called in that morning and resigned, just like that. So I got his address and went to his apartment, and the landlord said he moved out. Said some men came and cleared out his things and paid all his bills."

"You really did all that?" Bob asks. "And you wrote all that to your sisters?"

"Don't worry. Each one has a piece of something she doesn't un-

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derstand. And they never talk except to me. Of course, I'm the only one who knows the last part."

"Last part?"

"About how you said you paid Godfrey Burlington off this morning, which is impossible, since he disappeared last week. If there was a payoff, it happened then, not this morning. I figure something else happened to Godfrey Burlington. But that's your business, not mine."

Bob rubs his chin nervously—his left hand, still on the pocket of his jacket, doesn't move. "What's to keep you from sending the last part to one of them—or all of them?"

"No point in it," Glenda says.

"There's no point in any of it, then. If your sisters never communicate, they'll never know what their individual pieces of this—this story of yours mean."

"But if they did communicate, they'd know everything, wouldn't they? And by then somebody would have noticed Godfrey Burlington missing. Maybe somebody would have even found him by then, assuming—you know."

Bob glowers at her, the lights of his city dancing in his eyes. "Why?" he asks.

"Just something to make them curious, get them talking to one another if anything ever happened to me. They'd talk then, of course. They'd try to figure out which one I told most about my mystery man, and pretty soon they'd know everything."

Bob eases his left hand off his jacket pocket, sighs, and puts his right arm back around her. "What makes you think something might happen to you?"

"Lonely people can't be too careful," she says.

"Nothing will happen to you," Bob says.

"I didn't think so, either. Let's skip the walk." She snuggles against him, easing into a kiss that, as always, begins tentatively but won't remain that way for long. It's not the Caymans. But for lonely people, second best can be better than just good enough.

"Q"

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a ***NEW*** short story by

ROBERT BARNARD

Sutcliffe had felt that the killing had many of the hallmarks of a "domestic." There had been testimony from friends and relatives that the marriage had been going through a tense phase at the time—minor spats in public, things heard from next door, Harry staying away from home more often than his job would seem to warrant.

In Twentieth Century Crime and Mystery Writers *(St. Martin's second edition published in 1985), Jon L. Breen writes: "One of the best practitioners of the classical mystery to make a debut in the 1970s, Barnard seems a safe bet for long-lasting fame in the field." Safer than houses . . .*

THE NICK OF TIME

by ROBERT BARNARD

"You've certainly turned up in the nick of time," said Superintendent Sutcliffe. "Though I'm not at all sure we could ever have made a charge against him stick. At best, the evidence against him is all negative evidence."

That had been the problem all along. Alison Grantly had been murdered at her home in Hendon at around ten-thirty one night in September, when she was already in bed. The house bore all the signs of a break-in—the windowpane cut out, jewelry and silver missing, parts of the house ransacked. It was her husband Harry who had discovered the chaos and the body when he arrived home at five minutes to midnight. The police surgeon had been quite adamant that he could not have done the murder then.

And yet Sutcliffe had felt that the killing had many of the hallmarks of a "domestic." There had been testimony from friends and

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relatives that the marriage had been going through a tense phase at the time—minor spats in public, things heard from next door, Harry Grantly staying away from home more often than his job as a buyer for a big and prestigious chain of men's outfitters would seem to warrant. Then again, there was something amateur about the supposed burglary that had Sutcliffe sniffing suspiciously—but then, he argued in his fair-minded way, only an amateur would kill in the course of a minor and routine suburban operation.

Above all, there was the startling coincidence that the murder had happened on a night when the two children, Nicholas and Frieda, were away from home—a rare occurrence. They had gone immediately after school that Friday to spend the weekend with their father's parents in Bournemouth.

Harry Grantly's alibi had been simple: he had been drinking in a saloon bar of a big motorway pub he sometimes used when he was on the road. The bar staff there certainly recognized him as an occasional customer, but they had been unable to confirm his presence there on that particular night. Harry had said that he had got talking with a stranger in the bar about this and that, mainly about the fortunes of the Arsenal Football Club, which he and the other man had both supported since boyhood. His story was that he had got there about nine-fifteen, had got talking to the stranger about nine-thirty, and they'd been at it until they'd left the pub sometime after time had been called—around eleven-fifteen. Grantly had described the man as fair-haired, around thirty, and wearing a green-check jacket.

The problem had been finding him. The fact that the pub had been a large motorway one just outside London had meant that the stranger could be from anywhere, and on his way to anywhere. When local inquiries had failed to find him, the police had gone nationwide on the television program, *Crimewatch*.

And now, thanks to the miracle of television, here he was—fair hair, green-check jacket, and all.

"It was my mother who saw the program," Jeremy Parsons was saying. "She remembered the day I went away my saying at breakfast that I'd had a long chinwag about Arsenal with a pleasant chap at the Duck and Whistle, on the M1 near Letchworth."

"I gather you've been out of the country, sir?" Sutcliffe said.

"That's right. My mother mentioned the program when I got back, and I phoned you people. I work for a paper company that has links

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with Scandinavia. I've been in Sweden. Otherwise I'd probably have seen your earlier appeals in the London papers. I live in Finchley."

"I've asked Mr. Grantly to come in," said Sutcliffe, "so you can formally identify him as the man you talked to. You're both Arsenal fans, I gather?"

"That's right, from way back. I've never seen him there, but like so many I don't go as much as I used to. Not so pleasant nowadays, with all the thuggery."

"You didn't talk about anything more personal?"

"Like his marriage, you mean? No, I'm afraid we didn't talk about that." But a thought struck him, and he screwed up his face. Sutcliffe sat waiting quietly. "Though there was one thing—"

"Yes?"

"It's so long ago. I haven't had any reason to think of the conversation since. It was toward closing time, and I was wondering if my mother would be getting worried, and he said something like: 'My kids are with the grandparents, so I've nothing to hurry home for.' Of course it probably meant nothing, probably he didn't mean it like that at all, but it did cross my mind that it didn't suggest a happy marriage."

Sutcliffe leaned back in his chair. "That's a very valuable piece of information, sir."

"Oh?"

"It proves it was Friday when you talked—not, say, Wednesday or Thursday. The children didn't go to their grandparents till Friday after school."

"Oh, it was Friday all right." Jeremy Parsons looked at the sharp-eyed policeman in front of him. "I'm only an outsider at your game, Superintendent, but isn't all this suspicion of this man just because he was the husband a bit out of date? After all, divorce is easy these days."

"Yes, quite. Domestics usually happen in the heat of the moment, at the height of a row, and there's no question of that here. On the other hand, there are the children."

"Children?"

"Yes. He has two. Courts never, or almost never, award the father custody of the children. It's understandable. If he's going off to live with another woman, this could be an added, traumatic disruption in their lives. If he's going to live alone, they say he won't be able to look after them properly."

"Was there another woman in this case?"

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"None at all. We investigated pretty thoroughly, since he does a lot of traveling around, but there wasn't a trace of anything of the sort."

"But I take it he was fond—sorry, is fond—of the children?"

"Intensely fond. Devoted. And there were suggestions that the mother was having a bad effect on them. We heard from the neighbors that she was a woman of sudden, terrible rages, quite uncontrollable, and that the children—a boy and a girl, twelve and ten—were becoming cowed, introverted."

Jeremy Parsons nodded. "I see. Of course, I'm a bachelor, so I can't really talk about that as a motive. I have a colleague who is terribly worried about the effect her husband is having on their children, and I suppose this is much the same thing. Still, it does seem to me pretty slight as a motive."

"You're probably right. Ah—here is Mr. Grantly."

The two men got up as Harry Grantly came in, followed by a uniformed sergeant. The husband of the dead woman was a stocky man in his mid-thirties, dressed in a sober suit with a scarf against the early evening chill. Sutcliffe had come to know him well in the weeks since his wife's death, and to like him—insofar as such a reaction is allowable toward someone who had to be seen as a suspect. The meeting between him and Parsons was friendly, but slightly awkward, as was to be expected.

"Good to see you. Glad you turned up."

"Only sorry I didn't come forward earlier, to prevent all this uncertainty. I was out of the country."

"Oh, yes, you're in—what was it? You did tell me."

"Paper."

"Right." Grantly turned to Sutcliffe. "Sorry I'm a bit late. The bus was held up in rush-hour traffic."

"You're at your firm's headquarters now, aren't you, sir?"

"That's right. Just off the Tottenham Court Road. That's why I don't use my own transport any more." He turned back to Jeremy Parsons. "The firm has been very good. Being on the road as much as I used to be just wasn't on, not with the kids to look after, so they found me a job at headquarters. The children go to a neighbor's when they get home from school and I'm usually home well before six."

"How have they taken—this?"

"Oh, as well as could be expected, in the circumstances. It was a dreadful shock, naturally. But, of course, children have a certain

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natural elasticity. I'm beginning to hope there won't be any long-term harm."

"Well, now," said Sutcliffe, gesturing them both to chairs, "if we may just complete the formalities." To Parsons he said, "You've no doubt, sir, that this is the man you met and talked with in the Duck and Whistle near Letchworth?"

"None at all. This is the man."

"On the evening of Friday, September the twenty-third?"

"That's right. I took an SAS flight to Stockholm the next day. It's in my diary, and I've checked it."

"Then I'll have Sergeant Morton here type a brief statement to that effect for you to sign, all right?"

Jeremy Parsons nodded.

"Will you need me any more, Superintendent?" asked Grantly. "I'd like to get home to Nicholas and Frieda."

"Of course, sir. No, there's nothing more you can do for us. I should say that I don't hold out much hope of an early arrest. In fact, probably our best hope is for him to get caught on some similar job in the future."

"Yes. I realize that the trail isn't getting any hotter. But you'll keep me informed, won't you?"

"I will, sir."

When Parsons had read through and signed the statement, and had assured them he would be home for the next few weeks, Sutcliffe and Morton went down for a coffee in the cafeteria on the third floor. Standing at the window, drinking the hot, tasteless brew, Sutcliffe said: "One of those cases where a hunch proves wrong."

"Looks like it, sir."

"The hunch never did have a great deal behind it. I never liked the coincidence of the children being away from home—but I should know by now that coincidences happen. It just seemed that somehow they were being *spared*. Then there was the fact that, though the body was found on the floor, it was possible that the attack began while she was still in bed, even while she was still asleep. That blood on the pillow—she could have fallen back onto the bed in the course of the attack, of course, but somehow it didn't look like that. I just had no sense of her having surprised a burglar, which is really the only way to account for her being bludgeoned as she was."

"Looks like one for the files, though, doesn't it, sir?"

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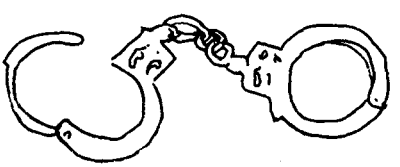
"It does. We'll be in the nasty position of waiting for something to turn up."

He gazed into the gathering twilight, at the neat streets leading toward St James's Park and Buckingham Palace. The office workers had gone home and the streets were nearly deserted. At a bus stop near the corner of Caxton Street, a man waited—a man in a dark-grey suit with a scarf around his neck. Sutcliffe saw the back of a man approaching him from the direction of New Scotland Yard, a man in a green-check jacket, and in the moment that he passed the waiting man he could have sworn that lightly, fleetingly, they kissed.



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a ***NEW*** short story by

ROBERT TWOHY

In writing about Robert Twohy in the same edition of Twentieth Century Crime and Mystery Writers, *Frank D. McSherry, Jr., writes: "One of Twohy's two major themes is that for many Americans, lacking education and special gifts, crime is the only realistic way of rising above their status, their world, their flow. The second theme, the flow itself, marks Twohy as a modern writer living in the world of Einstein where all is relative and related, and of Heisenberg where all is uncertainty. If every thing is related to every other, then no statement can be* entirely *false; the wrong reasoning can lead to the right conclusion. In an uncertain universe, morals will be uncertain, too."*

One of Robert Twohy's most powerful stories yet . . .

AT A REST STOP SOUTH OF PORTLAND

by ROBERT TWOHY

Cop cruiser comes up behind me, maybe tails me a little. I get that tingle—is the word out to flag down Cal. PKWDTOM?

Not yet. He zoops on by.

I send notes to PD's and Sheriff's Departments in various states signed *Park Warrior—Don't Tread On Me.* Then I sketch a kind of teddy-bear face, Cal. being the Bear State. Simple enough. Any word game is when you know the answer.

I don't end all the notes that way. Some I put just *Park Warrior.*

My first glimpse of a cop on my tail, part of me says, Good. I don't think I'd do time if Illinois didn't get connected, which there's no reason it should, I didn't send a note that time. Or after San Fran-

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cisco. Or Mississippi. Those two don't worry me, they were clear-cut and I'd just tell what happened those places. Only Illinois is ambiguous and could be a problem, maybe long-term. But I don't think they'd connect it. If they did, I'd just say, "No, sir, not me," and they'd have to make a case, which I doubt they could.

Most likely if arrested, I'd do a few months for leaving the scene, maybe a lot of scenes. Which would be okay. I'd have time to rest up, get my head organized, maybe do some writing.

I've had thrills, spills, pain, terror, that great sweeping rush that hits—the agony and the ecstasy, life on the knife's edge. But at thirty-one you're on the downgrade—though I don't feel it, I know it's so. And there've been nights I had to be a hundred percent and still reach for that extra something, which maybe one night won't be there.

But I won't turn myself in. The play ends when a cop flags me down or I get involved with someone I can't handle and he goes on to kill or cripple me. The word is fatalism, I guess—I started the play, but it's got its own life now and ends when it ends, not when I say.

I was in Mississippi on my way back from Montgomery, Alabama, where I'd been a month, nothing happening. So it goes. Most of my trips all I get is a view of the place, a stretch of anticipation, excitement—then fadeout, back home until next trip.

About twenty percent wind up with a note to the cops, along with whatever souvenirs I can send them—the guy's wallet, driver's license, weapon, ring, wristwatch, anything that might be helpful. When he's carrying nothing, I try for his photo with my minicamera and/or his prints on one of the 3x5 cards I carry. If he gets away clean, all I send is the note, describing the incident, time and place, him as good as I can, then the signoff—in full or part, depending on my mood or what happened.

Twenty percent might be a good average, but I have nothing to compare it to. There may be others doing what I'm doing, but I don't know of any and nobody knows me. I'm the complete loner. Which wasn't true my first twenty years—but that was a different person then, who I lost on purpose. Now I'm Park Warrior.

This is the first I've written in a long time. Why, I don't know, except long ago I wanted to be a writer and maybe that's suddenly coming back, the urge to string words.

At UCSB, the Creative Writing guy—Sprague? Sprott?—he said find your point and stick to it, move everything toward the finish.

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But what's the point? What's the finish? I don't know. I'm sitting here writing in this notebook about Park Warrior, whose finish might be in a park in a city I haven't been to yet, though parks aren't the only scenes I play. It might be on a beach, in the ocean, a slough, a gully in the wilds somewhere.

Or in jail, the play closed down, me resting up and preparing for the next stage I'll play. Maybe up in Canada where I've never been. I could rent a house in a quiet, slow-lane town, write stories, get known and have friends.

For seven years I've been in a play with no script, and if there's a plot-line only the Great Writer knows. But maybe He, She, or It is just an off-scene player in the no-script play with scenes just happening—Theater of the Now, of the Knife.

I started to tell about Mississippi—why? Spogue—Sprain?—said catch the attention early with a specific scene. Whose attention? Who am I writing this for, and why? Those are questions whose answer I don't rightly know, but it could be the play is almost played and what's left now is summary.

I'm pulled up at a rest stop on a hillside in Oregon—47 miles to Portland, the last sign said. It's just on the soft edge of dark. I started from L.A. early yesterday, stopped last night at a Travelodge, started out again at dawn, and here I am. In Portland I'll be as long as it takes to play a scene, or not play one, then back to L.A. Or maybe not. Maybe I'll get flagged down.

I'm hungry and there's no food in the van. But I'll go on with this whatever-it-is—essay? diary? confession? Then I'll find a restaurant, then park somewhere and go into Portland tomorrow early and poke around, read the papers, get a map, and stroll some parks and see if the feeling hits that says, *yeah yeah, start here.*

Thirty-one is young for a writer, or young enough, and I'll go to Canada and write good stories and make friends in that quiet town I'll find, go on dates, have laughs and fun that isn't on the edge of the knife, and maybe closeness developing with someone.

Park Warrior has been my passion for nearly seven years and I have the feeling more and more that the play is winding down.

Okay. Summary: overall I've done good and a few women, maybe more than a few, are better off for me.

Not the guy's wife in Illinois, or his daughter or two granddaughters. Not them, but—but what? But nothing. They got hurt probably wrongly and that's how it was.

I never wrote them. What was there to say? *I'm sorry about your*

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man, who was probably all right but maybe not—maybe that's my own fiction that he was. Maybe I read his eyes wrong. I never wrote them or the cops there.

I don't know the reality of that scene in Illinois and never will.

Okay. Lay it out flat and cold how Park Warrior began. I was a young bride living with Tim in a rented cottage near UCSB. He was going to be a doctor and I was going to be a writer, and one evening we rode to a lake in the hills and strolled, and it was lovely and right and then it was over, that life of innocence and trust and closeness. I was a young widow being raped by the first of three men who were the first to know me in the biblical sense but Tim—after which they left me with internal damage and skull fractures. I was in the hospital, then out, raving at cops why they didn't catch the killers. Then it was the nuthouse for two years. The killers weren't caught.

Then I was home with my parents, an outpatient for two years. Then Mother was killed in a car crash and Dad lingered a few weeks, during which we got close for the first time since early girlhood, when I got all wrapped up in my emerging wonderfulness as young girls do. My grief for Tim got mixed up with the sorrow for Mother and Dad when he went.

I was twenty-four and inherited, sold the house, and moved into a triplex rental in a quiet part of L.A., which is still my address—though half the time I'm on the road in my van, which inside is fixed like a little paneled room with an oil lamp on now as I write. I've got framed prints on the paneling—Cezanne, Klee, Monet—and a narrow flat mattress and blankets and throw-pillows and a little low desk and books and shades on the windows and a good lock on the side door. It's Park Warrior's traveling camp and always in A-one operating shape.

I realized the cops would never find Tim's murderers and stopped bugging them—I was one young widow among many they had to deal with, along with doing their best to find the killers without any leads, so why plague them? It was my problem to work out myself, or work myself out of.

How?

One night came lunging into my head from nowhere a still from that great old Mel Gibson movie, *Road Warrior*, him standing hand on hip with his gun and that wonderful I'm-ready-for-all-you-got look—and it wasn't *his* face but mine. And came that sweep of joy that comes when you know an answer is without any doubt the only

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and true answer. I whispered, "Park Warrior," and had a point to my life for the first time since Tim.

First I got fit with aerobics and weights, and also a Chinese philosophy-of-movement course I'd heard of in college—you get aware of every part of your body and how moves relate and how to get your mind in tune with the moves. Harmony of mind and body with nature is the goal—harmony is the ultimate power. I was dedicated. I got good. I've stayed good. But I'm thirty-one. Thirty-one or fifty or older don't matter if you're completely into that philosophy, but I'm not completely into it, part of my mind is apart. And that's the part that getting older affects, that can screw up the whole. One move or thought a hair out of sync could be my last, as was almost true in Mississippi.

Maybe I just wrote that to make clear to myself that it's time to wind down the play. Which I said earlier I couldn't do on my own. But that thought could be changing. I could be working into a new thought as I write. Maybe that's why I'm writing.

I bought the van—with regular plates then. PKWDTOM came later.

Road Warrior had a gun but Park Warrior didn't want a gun. Something sudden happens and BOOM, that's it, and maybe you weren't sure of the situation or read it wrong. Or the gun jams and there's no boom. Or BOOM and you miss, and in her apartment a block away a young bride is fixing dinner for her love and your bullet comes strolling in the window and she's dead. So no gun. I wanted clear confrontals, encounters of the closest kind, me and whoever, no bystanders or witnesses—just me and him, no boom.

Confrontals. I meant *confrontations*. But confrontals, I like it. Shorter and suddener.

Sparkman—that was his name, the Creative Writing guy. So what? So he said, "Don't put in something and just leave it hanging." Okay, man, I hear you—now you're not hanging.

I got some tough clothes and hung around some low-grade places in L.A. I knew what I wanted. I got tangled up with some guys best forgotten, lay it to making myself into a girl I'd never been and decided I'd better be. Anything that happened those nights was my own doing and nothing too dire happened. I got beat up a few times and a girl went for me with a knife and meant it, but I slipped clear and next time I saw her we were friends again. She said it wasn't me but another girl trying to take Earl from her. It *was* me, but he and I were careful after that.

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He was what I'd been looking for—a real switchblade ace. I had him get me one and he taught me a lot, and after a while I knew all he knew and was better. He said I was a natural and I wasn't, it was the fitness classes and the Chinese mind-body harmony and the hunger to be good that made me good. I left that scene feeling the time had come.

I knew I'd never find the guys who had murdered Tim and the me I'd been then, but they had stopped being primely important. They were just three among a horde of men with such a lousy view of themselves that they can rise out of it only at the moment of dominance of a terrified, helpless woman—which for some is only foreplay for the ultimate ecstasy: ripping her apart and throwing her away.

Every man has a beast in him. That's from Freud, sort of—most men control it, some don't. When they don't, you can say it's not their fault, they just lack good control equipment. It doesn't matter to me—my thing is to confront the beast, whoever he's using that night, and get him down with my knife at his throat. That's the big rush I spoke of—turning the terror back on him, seeing it shine in his eyes.

I walked alone in still places, in parks, on beaches, down mangy streets. I didn't flaunt, but dressed quiet—jacket, bandana over most of my hair, walking like a woman bound somewhere, didn't linger. I wanted no ambiguities but clear definition as to who started the waltz, who was the aggressor.

After a confrontal, I'd send the cops there a note with whatever I got from the guy—if nothing, his photo and/or fingerprints if I could. Sometimes I couldn't, he got away. Those times I'd describe him as clearly as I could, including wounds I might have given him.

I knew they couldn't charge him without me in person, but they could check on him, maybe connect him with some unsolved crimes against women in their files. Or if not, let him know they had their eye on him. I'd tell the guy I was sending the note, just to make his rotten night a little worse.

The personal plates as clue to the signoff line came after the seventh or eighth confrontal. I thought I was giving cops a sporting crack at me, like Zorro with his Z, but that was kidding myself somewhat. I know now those early notes were my first whisper: *This is a dangerous play I'm in, and it could end hard and bloody for me. So work out the clue and find me, okay?* Part of me back then wanted out of the play and does now.

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Mississippi I mentioned. Tell about it.

I was passing a third-rate camp place, coming back from a nothing trip to Montgomery, and got the feeling I should pull in—a feeling I respond to as it signals a confrontal often enough so that when it hits me I respond.

Within an hour there, I knew a lunkish man had his eye on me.

The rest of that day I spent mostly in my van, completely so after dark. I gave him that time to pull out, if he was going to, next day. I don't push things—we'd meet if my feeling was right and we had a scene to play.

Next day I browsed in the near town and saw him there.

A depressing kind of woods was behind the camp and I took a walk there and saw him. Others were walking. He looked at me.

About ten that night, it was quiet and dark in the trailers, campers, and the few cabins. I came out of my van and strolled to the far edge of the grounds. I wore a neat red shirt and trim grey denims and, resting my arms on the fence, gazed at the pale Mississippi moon.

I wrote earlier that I don't linger or flaunt. Was I flaunting that night? Oh, yes, sir. Oh, you bet. Shirt, pants, the way I stood were flaunts. I should have written, *rarely* do I flaunt. That night I did.

I knew he was close—faint beast smell? Close and coming closer, me at the fence gazing moonward.

His lunge was with a grunt and I jumped to the left, spinning, and saw a gun in his left paw still on the way to where my head had been. He'd meant to knock me cold, get me over or through the fence and into the woods, and, after using me, throw me away.

He was on his right front foot, his arm raised, freeze-frame. I slashed the gun hand, reached my left hand, and jumped back with the gun.

His eyes had that shine of fear and I got the rush. "Get over the fence," I ordered, and if he hadn't twisted to the fence he'd have been stuck good. I jabbed again and he got over, with me alongside, keeping the gun pointing at him, sure by the way he eyed it that it had at least one bullet.

We walked into the woods, me off to his left, he gripping his slashed hand. "Give me your wallet," I said. He said no. I stopped him with the point of the blade on his neck and the gunhole a foot from his face. His eyes were slick-sick and he mumbled, loose-lipped, "I don't have it on me. It's back in my truck. Honest."

Maybe true, maybe not. I wasn't going to parade him back through

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the campgrounds. Before I left him I'd make him pull out his pockets. I'd walk him deep into the woods and take his shoes, and before he limped back I'd be gone in my van. Tomorrow I'd mail the cops in the near town a note with his gun and whatever he had in his pockets, or a snapshot and prints—and his shoes. Why not? Often they can be a clue to a crime.

That was thinking ahead which, I see as I write about it, tips off that I wasn't a hundred percent that night. Thinking ahead is dumb. The mind should be full on the now, as things can happen sudden.

I walked him a way farther, then sat him down, made him stretch his legs out all the way and lean his weight back on his hands. A tree was a foot or so behind him, too close—make mistakes and learn from them. I wasn't a hundred percent. The moon came down on us through the tops of the trees. I was in a crouch two feet from his shoe soles, gun on him, switchblade back in my shirt. "You were going to rape me."

"No."

"Going to kill me after?"

"No."

"You've raped a lot of women?"

"No."

"Killed any?"

"No." Four lies in a row, each showing clear in his eyes, which slid down to his slashed hand, oozing not much now. "You cut me bad. You didn't have to do that."

"Are you wanted?"

"For what?" He was wanted.

"Where'd you kill the woman? Or is it more than one?"

"Are you a cop?"

"Park Warrior. Don't tread on me."

"What are you gonna do?"

"Shoot you if you act smart." I'd partly come out of the crouch to pull the camera from my left hip pocket, and that was, as I mentioned, getting out of sync. Pulling in his feet, he heaved up and back into the tree and off it on his toes, diving, looming over me and coming down arms wide. I had one move, my finger on the trigger—BOOM, bullet into his wide-open mouth taking out the back of his head as he came on down with his brains floating behind. His stretched right arm clubbed me down.

In the light of the Mississippi moon.

I walked to the fence and looked over the campground. No lights

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were on. I saw no flashlights and heard no questioning shouts. Those who heard the BOOM, as some must have, figured it was none of their business if they didn't make it so and they were right.

I walked back to him, wiped the gun on my shirt, put it in his left hand, and walked back to my van.

If anyone wandered into the woods the next morning and found him, I didn't know it, being long gone.

I'm forty-seven miles or a little less from Portland. I'm hungry and tired. I'll stop this, drive on, and find a restaurant. But I'm near the end—of what? I'd be days writing about the last seven years, if that's what I'm doing. What am I doing? I don't know. All I know is I'm still writing and can't stop yet—I don't know why, but have to go on a while.

I didn't send the cops a note. They'd find him or hear about him in time or not, tie him to rapes and a murder or not. I never knew who he was, where he'd killed the woman or women, never tried to check. He didn't interest me dead. The beast had lost a stooge was all, and a few Mississippi women were better off, if he was a Mississippian.

The beast is without brains or memory and has never learned that with my blade I'm better than most he sends against me.

But not all. I'm not Bionic Woman. I run when I have to, when I can. Sometimes I can't—I've had two switchblades taken. After the first one, I went to Earl but learned he was dead. He was a good teacher. So was Sparkman, whether I learned anything from him or not. I scouted elsewhere and got one, then later from that source the one I have now.

The times I ran or got put on my back I've written the cops as to when and where, described the guy as I could, signing off just *Park Warrior* without the brag or the bear. If flagged down and arrested, I'll have my lawyer try to turn up some of those loser's notes, which would be in my favor, showing I'm not some kind of grotesque who never gets hurt but only hurts others. I get hurt. When pricked, I bleed. I don't think I'm some kind of grotesque.

At a library near my place in L.A., where nobody knows me and I know nobody, I browse out-of-town papers, looking for stories of crimes against women. I study details, and maybe one case in twenty I get the feeling I should go there. If it stays strong, next day I pack the van and head there.

It's a shot in about 10,000 that that killer or rapist or rapist-killer

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will pick up on me—but he's not the point. The beast is the point, whoever he's using. Two trips in ten I confront him, if not in the particular place then on my way there or coming back—as coming back from Montgomery that night of brains in the moonlight.

In Denver a man sobbed that it was his first attack on a woman, and his eyes and tone were true. He said he didn't know what had come over him and he'd get therapy. He was a junior exec, I found out from cards in his wallet, young talent on his way up—photos showed a nice house, a nice wife, a young son. He begged for a break—he'd give me $800.00, all he had, as his bankbook showed—and tomorrow he'd meet me anywhere I said with the cash. I didn't doubt him, he meant it. He swore that tonight he'd learned a lesson he'd never forget. He'd get therapy.

I said, "Good," gave him back his wallet, and told him I was going to send his driver's license to the Denver cops with a note describing the night's action and he could go to them for his license or they'd come to him. I left him in a heap, pounding his fists in the grass.

His little boy maybe loved him a lot. Maybe he was a wonderful husband and father. Maybe sending a note and his license to the cops was the best thing I could have done for the three of them. Maybe it was the worst. I do what I do.

I killed a man in Illinois and one in San Francisco. But my object isn't to kill. I could have many times. Anyone good with a blade can kill when she's disarmed the man, if he was armed, and has him down with the blade at his throat. I've written about how seeing the terror in his eyes is the great rush—the ecstasy? Yes.

Park Warrior will be in the past and I'll be a writer. I know that more and more as I write this, that I can close the play down and move on to the life ahead, a writer's life in Canada, finding closeness with someone there.

I was in a town in Illinois, a nice town, coming back from Chicago, where nothing happened. In this town was a park, clean and trim, with trees in rows and well kept bushes and flowerplots. I walked there because it was cool and pretty and that's a lie because I don't walk in parks at midnight in a town I've come to on a trip except for the one purpose.

A thin grey man came at me onto the path from my right, with an arm out to take me around the waist. I spun clear and he pulled up, teetered on his toes, and gave me an odd look of yearning, then fell forward.

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His chin was up and his throat was bare and stretched, and I held my wrist stiff and the knife slid in.

I'd never stabbed a man in the throat and didn't that night. His throat went for the point, which I held there for that half second, and he kept falling and the handle dug into the sod and all the blade was in his throat.

He lay there and died without another move. Blood, not a lot, was around him in the grass. Reaching under, I worked the knife out, wiped it and my fingers with grass, tucked it in my shirt, and left the park running. What the look he gave me meant hit me as I was running.

And that's a lie that I've told myself until right this moment—that not until I was running away did I get what the look meant. I knew right away as he teetered, what it meant—that he didn't have the beast in him, that he wasn't out to hurt me.

In another town the next day I got the paper from that nice town and it was the big story, half the front page and two inside pages with photos. He ran a department store and was on the city council. The photos were close up, as in life, of a pleasant face with good quiet eyes, and of him with his family—widow, daughter, two granddaughters. Nice family, good people.

The townspeople couldn't believe it—"Who would murder Tom?" Everyone agreed it had to be a madman from elsewhere, killing from madness as Tom hadn't been robbed.

Tom was found within a half hour of the killing. If I'd lingered to go through his pockets to find who he was or if he had a weapon, I'd have been spotted and taken—with my knife—and who would have believed that that man of fine reputation had rushed me and I'd defended myself?

I hadn't defended myself. He was falling with that look of yearning and I'd held my wrist stiff, knowing he wasn't the beast.

You can know nothing about yourself for a long time and everything in the second that you strip away the lie you've hid behind.

I wrote that scene because I had to. It's the scene that has troubled me, and no other has. I had to find the truth of it. He wasn't the beast, which I saw clear he wasn't and would not accept. I had tripped to Chicago and not found him and had gone to that park for him and wanted him. As Tom teetered and I saw he wasn't him, I called for him—didn't call but sent the signal, and he came and we killed Tom.

Why did he rush me? The paper said he was a Viet combat vet

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with ribbons and honors. Did he get a split in his head that night? Did he often get a split in the head and his wife and daughter never let it be known? Was he peacefully walking home from a meeting across the park and was it suddenly not the park but someplace in Vietnam, shells coming in—and did he spot not me but a Vietnamese girl he loved, and did he rush from another path to sweep me clear of shells coming in?

That's fiction, of course. I don't know why he rushed me, but somehow I know it wasn't to overpower and dominate me. I think he wanted to catch me and carry me clear of danger that thundered in his head, or die with the girl he loved.

If I'd pulled back the knife, he'd have gone on his knees and I'd have kicked him over on his back and put the knife to his throat and asked questions as I watched his eyes and learned why he rushed me or if he was lying. As it is, I know nothing except that I had a split-second to pull the knife back and instead held it stiff so the beast and I could share my gift to him of blood.

Hate and love—two sides of the same coin? I suppose. Did I hate the beast because I dared not admit I wanted to be loved and possessed by him? Did I want him in me? Has that been the point of the play, which wasn't the point at the start but somewhere along did it become the point—to prove my love, as I did that night, to take him into me and be one with him?

Thoughts I've never had before, or, if so, have pushed away. That's what this compulsion to write has brought me—a view of myself I've never had. You know when a perception is right and true.

I read the words that come out from under my ballpoint like this is a story I'm reading. I've heard of automatic writing and I guess this is it, the writing doing itself as I hold the pen and turn pages in the notebook. The finish will be when the writing stops itself, when I'll put down the pen.

I've killed three men. Now the third death will get told. Why, though? Wasn't the Illinois murder the point?

A mean street in San Francisco. That's Chandler's term, mean streets. He never wrote of San Francisco that I know. His mean streets were in L.A. and environs. What do I care, what does he care? The words just come. But you should stay in the place you know and feel. As a new young writer, I'll go to Canada and find a slow town and learn it and become at home there and write about it, and have friends and closeness with a man there. Right now I'm

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at home anywhere if it's a park and dark and still. Though only in Illinois was the killing in a park.

In San Francisco it was in the Mission, the district that evolves around Mission Dolores there. I was on my way to a park at 1:30 A.M. and a man came behind me and looped his right arm around my neck, not tight enough. I dropped through, spun to my left, and came up with the knife—and a second man was there and the blade drove into his groin. He screamed and fell into me, knocking me into an iron stairrail, and the first guy had a flat rock in his right palm and went for my head while the groined guy went down to the sidewalk and rolled away, holding himself and screaming, blood leaking through his fingers.

I was ducking and slipping the rock and betweentimes reaching and slashing. He was lean and quick, and his friend twisted and arched in the gutter and screamed. I suppose lights had gone on and people were at windows, but I had no time or interest to check that. The man wanted to brain me and what would come of that afterward didn't matter to him right then—he was into the kill, a lean and avid beast with a rock. I was a beast with a knife and quicker, he was stronger—and the beast owned us both, I see now, and loved us for the gift the three of us would share.

I cut his arm. He was making quick pokes with the rock, to stun me so he could measure and brain me. I was up and down and to the sides, mostly avoiding the pokes but taking a few, mostly on the left arm I was using to block. A backhand slash sliced deep into his wrist. Blood spurted and he yelled and dropped the rock. To my left in the gutter, the man twisted and screamed.

If the man had stepped back from me, I'd have been gone from that scene. Maybe eight or ten seconds we'd fought. But the beast roared in his head that he must fall on me, and he did. I was flat on the sidewalk and his left hand was under my jaw, pushing as he groped for the rock, and that was wrong, the beast is not bright. His weight on my right hip had been pinning the knife under me. Stretching for the rock took the pressure off my hip and chin and I slipped my head to the side and raised my hip, freeing the knife. His throat was stretched right over me and I slashed, and kept slashing. As his blood rained on my face, my head rang the beast's scream of delight and I screamed with him until his head fell on my shoulder and his body was dead weight and the fight was over.

I pushed and wriggled out from under. His head was on the side-

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walk, left profile up, and the brown eye closed, then popped open like a wink.

Muscle reflex, I suppose. Or I imagined it. But for some reason, probably perverse, I think he gave me a goodbye wink.

What's real? Real is the moment and not the remembrance in words. Words are symbols we use to make order and reason where none was. Words are to verify that life makes sense and death, too. Which may be the great myth. But it's a myth we want to believe and are fools if we give up, because if so what's left? Only the beast in all of us.

After the wink he gave me, or didn't, his eye was clear for a second, then went to grey glass. I was up. Where the wounded one was I didn't know and didn't hear him.

How long was the fight—twenty seconds? half an hour? Time's a myth, too. A woman with blood all over her clothes, face, hair, and hands ran south up that mean street.

Nobody rose in front of me and nobody shouted to stop me, and a couple of sets of headlights came up but kept going. I ran to the next corner, cut left, and ran another block south. I piled into my van and heard sirens—and stayed low until they went by on Mission Street. One turned up my street and went past. Later I wended side streets and eventually got on 101 southbound, not slowing until just north of San Luis, halfway point to L.A.

Pulling up a farm road, I parked under trees, got in back, and peeled my bloody clothes off and into a plastic sack, then huddled in blankets and went to sleep.

If the farmer had come around and called the cops, the play would have ended that morning.

I was up early and rubbed and picked blood off my face and hands and out of my hair, wrapped a fresh bandana around my head, and got into clean clothes. I wiped and picked the cockpit and wheel more or less clean, drove to an early-open service station, filled up, and drove home to L.A. There I burned the clothes in the fireplace. After that, I took a complete bath and slept until the next day.

At the library, the San Francisco paper said the man died on the way to the hospital of loss of blood and the other was seriously but not fatally slashed. He said they had walked past a woman, who for no reason ran back in front of them and started slashing. He had no view of her, as it was so quick, and witnesses at windows couldn't describe her as she was all over blood. Nobody said anything about the van.

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I didn't send the SFPD a note.

The play is over. That's why I wrote this summary of my three killings, which are now in the past, with nothing more to say or think about them.

I've found out that I hate the beast and love him, and those killings were acts of love, as he knew all the time and I know now.

Words make the myths we live by and die for. The beast is reality, the white-hot core of humankind, so somebody said. And so what? Rise above reality into myth. If love is a myth, give me love. If beauty is a myth, like an evening by a lake, strolling with the one you mythically love, I'll take it and believe in it—not the reality that intruded on us there.

Love, honor, decency, loyalty, compassion for others—are they myths? Why not? Guard and treasure them.

The play is over. I can't handle the beast any more—he's taking me over and I know my love for him has become too much. I can't stand him any more because I can't withstand him any more. I know that, having seen myself—in this essay or analysis or whatever it has turned into, as I was in that park in that nice town in Illinois that night.

I'm at this rest stop south of Portland because I read in the library of a man savaging women there. He's killed three. The last was a month ago—which seems his pattern, a month or so in between.

Here's a question many men ask—why do women walk or jog alone in dark places? And they ask it to set up the answer, which can be put as a question. Are they looking for trouble, is that what they want? Which sets up the conclusion, also as a question. If so, when a bad thing happens, isn't it at least partly their fault?

I've never had that 1-2-3 set of questions put to me, but I've heard them put man-to-man in a bar or restaurant following some horrible crime in the news. I never cut in, being the cat that walks by herself. But once or twice I've been tempted to say, "Are you asking me specifically? Okay, I'll answer specifically—you're dead right and right on. That's why I walk alone in dark places, looking for trouble. Send me a rapist-killer and see how I do with my switchblade. Send me the beast, send me my love."

And I'd go on, in this monologue that'll never happen. "Other women I can't speak for. Each is herself. She may walk or jog alone in dark parks because she feels she owes it to life not to be afraid. Fear that would keep her behind locked doors at night may be anti-

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life for her, and she'll give it no room. She'll stroll or jog in parks and be free and alive while she's alive. Afterward is too late. She'll honor life now, and when death comes know she lived."

Here I am at the end of this that's turned into a discovery trip of myself and I'm hungry and tired and it's 12:38.

I hate and love him and have that strong feeling he'll be in a park in Portland.

I'm good. Maybe not as good as five years ago, but a lot better than most twenty-fives or twenties. I'm good, and you don't stop while you're good.

One more scene, one more waltz, one more ecstasy—*then* Canada?

Maybe. Wrong to look too far ahead. The living is now.

I went away from the thought I had at the beginning of this, which was the right thought and I know it and am back to it: the play ends when it ends, not when I say.

On a night in March, a young woman in old jeans and a scruffy shirt, blanket wrapped around her, wrote all that over about six hours without pause, except once to get a fresh ballpoint from the desk drawer. Then she closed the spiral notebook and put it and the pen in the drawer and, tossing aside the blanket, got up, stretched her whole body for a few seconds, then stepped around, letting up the shades on the windows. She slid her feet into sandals, put on a jacket, tied a green bandana around her hair, turned off the lamp, and, shoving back the front curtain, got in the cockpit. In a couple of minutes, she had backed the van clear and was on the highway toward Portland.

Her taillights proceeded straight about a half mile, then veered around a curve just as a highway cruiser passed the rest stop northbound. In a few seconds its taillights veered around the curve.

A play ends when it ends.

"Q"

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a *NEW* short story by

DONALD OLSON

Ever since it had happened, three months ago, Richard had grown accustomed to the unwelcome intrusion of strangers, though it was usually in the form of unknown voices on the telephone—cranks, every one of them. Yet he sensed immediately that this was something different, and all he could think to say was, "Would you care to rest a moment . . . ?"

NO HARD FEELINGS

by DONALD OLSON

Richard paused in his task of dead-heading the marigolds, leaned back on his knees, and brushed the sweat from his forehead. Even though he'd been at it for less than an hour, he was more than ready to call it a day, to fix himself a stiff drink with lots of ice, and to relax in the shade until it was time to go through the motions of preparing a simple lunch for which he would have no appetite. But he knew what would happen if he yielded to the impulse: one drink would be followed by another, and that by another and another until he would have neither the will nor the energy to boil an egg. Keep busy, everyone had said. You'll go nuts if you just sit around and think about it. Yet these were the same people who had talked him into taking a leave of absence when he appeared on the verge of a nervous breakdown.

To hell with it, he thought. One drink, then he'd finish the row.

As he stood up, he happened to glance down the hill toward the village beyond the railroad tracks, then went very still, blinking the film of sweat from his eyes. The figure of a woman stood gazing across at the lumberyard beside the tracks where the train station had stood years ago. In the near distance, her air of battered wear-

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iness and the suitcase she held might have suggested the disappearance of the station had come as a shock to her, as if she'd hoped to board one of the passenger trains that no longer stopped at Mereworth.

Richard wondered when he would cease to feel that instantaneous prickle of hope every time he saw a woman who looked even remotely like Dorothy, and he continued to watch as the woman crossed the tracks and started up the hill, walking with an appearance of great effort, as if her feet were sore or the suitcase too heavy. When she passed the only other house between the tracks and Richard's, he wondered where she could be going, his being the last house on the street.

She paused once or twice, shoulders sagging, until, seeing Richard on the sloping lawn looking down at her, she straightened and resumed her progress with quickening steps, like a runner calling up a last reserve of strength.

When she reached the edge of his property, she left the sidewalk and cut across the lawn directly toward Richard, dropped the suitcase beside one of the redwood chairs, and sat down heavily, wiping her forehead with a balled-up white handkerchief and regarding him with a placid, weary smile.

"Whew," she said breathlessly, "but ain't this one to melt the flesh off your bones?"

Ever since it had happened, three months ago, Richard had grown accustomed to the unwelcome intrusion of strangers, though it was usually in the form of unknown voices on the telephone—cranks, every one of them. Yet he sensed immediately that this was something different, and all he could think to say was, "Would you care to rest a moment?"

In view of her already being seated, the invitation might have betrayed a hint of sarcasm. "If it ain't no bother," she replied with a wry, half hearted smile, then fished a compact from her red-plastic shoulder bag and proceeded to dab at her flushed face with a powder puff. She might have been in her early forties, and even under the shade of the maple tree the dark roots of her dyed blonde hair were starkly visible. Prominent, doglike brown eyes and generous lips produced an impression of unguarded familiarity. Red-plastic loop earrings and flat-heeled sandals matched the color of her blouse under a wrinkled seersucker suit.

Richard, at a loss, looked down at the suitcase. A sample case,

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perhaps? Was she about to ask for the lady of the house? "Were you looking for someone hereabouts?" he asked her.

At that, as if amusement had been welling up in her and could no longer be contained, laughter burst from her lips with the startling effect of a clown's head popping out of a box on a spring.

"You don't have the ghost of an idea who I am, do you, Dickie?"

No one had called him Dickie since he was a child. He raised his hand, still strongly scented with the bitter fragrance of marigolds, and pressed his fingers against his face as he regarded her with sudden wariness. Yet he certainly didn't recognize anything familiar about her. "Should I know you?" he asked.

The smile turned coy. "I'll give you a clue."

It occurred to Richard that she might be one of those ghastly cousins of Dorothy's he'd met years ago at their wedding, come from afar to console him in his loss, and he watched with a sour expression as she leaned over to undo the clasps of the suitcase, then paused, looking up at him with twinkling amusement. "Blind your eyes."

"What?"

"Blind your eyes, Dickie. I'll tell you when to open."

With annoyed resignation, he did as she ordered, and when she said, "Okay, open," he saw nothing at first. She jerked her head toward the redwood table. Richard paled. The object was a small plastic boxcar of the kind usually sold as part of a toy train set. He suddenly felt dizzy and eased himself into the other chair.

"Oh, for God's sake, Dickie, *smile*. It's only a joke."

Desperate to be alone, he sprang up. "I need a drink."

"A drink would be lovely. Something tall and cold. Do you want me to—"

"No—stay there! I'll be right back."

In the kitchen he splashed cold water over his face, then rubbed it vigorously with a towel. He felt curiously disoriented, as if he'd already had one drink too many. For years he'd dreaded the chance of something like this happening, until gradually the possibility had grown increasingly remote, finally inconceivable, all but forgotten. Except lately, since Dorothy had gone, when he'd heard a train whistle in the night and it all came back to him more painfully vivid than any nightmare.

Calmer now, but still with a lurching, unstrung heart, he poured the drinks, using hardly any water and little ice, and carried them out under the tree.

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"Bless you, Dickie," she chirped, pressing the glass to her inflamed cheek before raising it in a salute. "Old times." If there was satire in the words, her guileless smile effectively disguised it.

"I can't believe this," he said, believing it all too well. "I can't believe it's you."

"Oh, it's me, big as life and twice as unpredictable. Good old Ginny." She looked away down the hill, at the somewhat dilapidated house crouching below the level of the sidewalk. "Your old place looks the worse for wear. Your folks both dead, are they?"

"Yes. As are yours, in case you didn't know."

She ignored this. "Remember the day we were playing hopscotch on the sidewalk in front of your house and those two stuck-up dames walked by and one of them said, 'What a dump,' and you piped up and said, 'I don't care, I don't live here.' And now you do live here, in my old house. How long have you lived here?"

"Since shortly after I married. I always liked this house. It was a good buy."

"I hated it. Because I hated *them*, I suppose. They never let me forget I was adopted. Little Miss Next-Best-Thing. Remember how I used to swipe money from my old man's pocket and we'd gorge ourselves on root-beer fizzes at the drugstore?"

The liquor seemed to be having no effect at all as Richard listened to her in bewildered astonishment. Was she utterly mad? How could she sit here mouthing trivialities while that appalling memento stood there reminding him of all the days and nights of guilt-ridden misery he'd suffered? For *years*. Or was she more cunning than she appeared, deliberately torturing him with this falsely sweet air of fond nostalgia?

"What about the time my mother sent us into the village to peddle her blackberries and we gobbled them all up and pretended some boys—"

"Stop it! For God's sake, stop it!"

A hand flew to her mouth. "Sorry, Dickie. Here I sit, rattling on about the good old days when you must be absolutely frantic. Poor Dickie, has it been hell for you?"

"What do *you* think? All those years. Not knowing—"

"But she's been gone only three months."

He stared at her. "You're talking about *Dorothy?*"

"Aren't you? Well, I'm sure it's seemed like *years* to you. Haven't those dumb cops come up with any clues? I read about it in a newspaper. They must have circulated her picture all over the country.

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So I says to myself, Dee honey, it's time you made a little trip back to Mereworth. Dickie needs you."

"Dee?"

"Delores May Bucklew. My real name. Bucklew was my hubby's name. He died two years ago. That's when I got the notion to hire this lawyer to trace my real parents. All he came up with was the name of my real mother who died two years after she put me up for adoption."

It was all too much for Richard. He raised his glass to his lips and found it empty. His look of dismay seemed to amuse her. "Don't tell me," she said. "You've been drinking too much and not eating right. Not that I blame you. But it's no good, Dickie. Look at you—you're thin as a pipe stem."

"I'm not exactly starving."

"Neither am I—that's pretty obvious. But I'm more than a mite peckish at the moment. Why don't I get settled in and then check the larder, see what my magic fingers can whip up for us?"

Richard panicked. "Settled in?"

"For as long as you need me. The way things look now, that could be for quite a spell. The trail must be cold by now. Chances are they never will find the poor thing." She lowered her voice to a softly insinuating plea. "Tell me the truth, Dickie. We've got no secrets from each other—except one. Are there things you didn't tell the police?"

Panic subsided into an angry, dull resentment. "Are you serious? Of course I told them everything I know. The last time I saw Dorothy was the morning she left for work. The last time anyone else saw her was that afternoon at the supermarket in the plaza. That's where they found her car—in the parking lot. She simply vanished. Without a trace."

His voice broke. After three months of fruitless speculation, the agony had scarcely abated. It was the uncertainty that was destroying him, the frightful conjectures, the endless rumors, the false leads, the crank calls.

When Ginny picked up the toy boxcar and turned it musingly in her hand, Richard steeled himself for one of those violent changes of mood he remembered from their childhood. Was she now ready to speak of that other disappearance? But all she said, smiling as she replaced the boxcar on the table, was, "In case you're wondering, Dickie, I've got no hard feelings. Not no more."

"But you know," he said quietly, looking away.

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The boxcar stood there, mutely accusing. "Oh, yes, I know. Hell, I've known ever since that crummy lawyer dug up my real name. He gave me more than I bargained for—a little bonus, you might say. Copies of all the old newspaper articles about my disappearance. All those 'No Trace of Lost Child' stories."

"And you kept quiet. Why?"

"Why not? Past history. Good lord, Dickie, you must have guessed the only reason they never found me was because I didn't *want* to be found."

"But that's monstrous!"

She laughed. "Hell, I was a monstrous kid. And I really did hate them, you know. Wild horses couldn't have dragged me back."

"My God. When I think of what I went through. The guilt. The nightmares. I still have them."

She reached out and patted his hand. "Poor Dickie. I guess maybe I'm the one should apologize to you."

Sleep was impossible. The only difference between this night and the others was that visions of Dorothy and what might have happened to her or what might be happening to her were submerged under more immediate reflections about Ginny and why she'd returned and how he could get rid of her. Once, shortly after midnight, he heard her get up and go to the bathroom, but after that all remained quiet in the guest room across the hall.

Later still, hearing the lonely purr of a train whistle in the distance, he became lost again in memories of the faraway past.

He was ten, Ginny a couple of years older and much wiser, a sly, inventive, precocious playmate, all moods and fantasies, a mistress of make-believe. They had their own private hideaway to which they escaped after school, running across the field and down into the ravine below the overhead bridge where a coal car and two empty freight cars had stood on a siding for as long as Richard could remember. They'd fitted one of the cars up with orange-crate cupboards and some ratty sofa cushions and various odds and ends of discarded household items and called it their Boxcar Palace.

Their parents disapproved of their playing anywhere near the tracks, but hadn't actually tried to put a stop to it until a woman had been raped and beaten by a section hand in one of the coal-storage sheds near the siding. The most dreadful punishments were threatened if Richard were to be caught going anywhere near the tracks. And Richard, being an obedient child, might have heeded

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their warnings if Ginny, the incorrigible rebel, hadn't coaxed and bullied and shamed him into sneaking off to their Boxcar Palace, all the more alluring to her once it became forbidden territory.

And then on one never-to-be-forgotten summer day Ginny had swiped ten dollars from her father's wallet and sent Richard off to the village to buy pop and potato chips while she remained behind in their hideaway to sleep and dream. It always astonished Richard how Ginny could fall asleep at the snap of her fingers. It didn't seem natural—but then a lot of things about Ginny didn't seem quite natural. Sometimes she scared him.

Approaching the drugstore, Richard had run into his mother, who had scolded him for running off instead of accompanying her to the market to help carry home the groceries. Nearly an hour had been lost before he could escape into the field and climb to the edge of the ravine overlooking the tracks. Looking down, he saw to his dismay that the doors of the Boxcar Palace were shut and a signalman was overseeing the slow progress of the three cars, now linked to two other freight cars and an engine, off the siding onto the main track.

That Ginny might still be in the car, asleep and undiscovered, seemed at the moment highly unlikely. Richard had raced back across the field and up the hill to Ginny's house. Barely able to hide his anxiety, he had pounded on the kitchen door until it was opened by Ginny's mother, who'd said, no, she had no idea where Ginny was—somewhere she shouldn't ought to be, most likely.

Like a runner pursued in a nightmare, Richard had flown back across the field to find the train just passing under the overhead bridge, gradually building up speed as it rounded the curve and headed west. By the time he had stumbled down the side of the ravine, there was no chance of catching up with the moving cars. He'd waved his arms and shouted himself hoarse, but the only response was the long, dying blast of the train's whistle.

In later years, Richard came to believe that his failure to act responsibly on that distant afternoon had produced, like Hamlet's dram of evil, a poisonous effect upon his entire life, infecting his spirit with a bitterness of guilt it could never shake off. At the time, of course, he had rationalized his cowardice, telling himself it would be only a matter of hours before Ginny was back home. Surely the train couldn't travel too far before she'd be discovered. So he'd said nothing, afraid to confess he'd disobeyed his parents' injunction never to play near the tracks. He had waited for what his adolescent logic had assured him was bound to happen. At any moment he'd

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fling open the screen door to find Ginny on the doorstep, bursting to tell him of her great adventure.

Eventually, dismayed and intimidated by the public clamor surrounding Ginny's disappearance, he hadn't had the courage to tell what he knew.

And Ginny never did come home.

When she hadn't come downstairs by eleven the next morning, Richard tried to nourish the tenuous hope that she might have stolen away in the night as mysteriously as she'd arrived. Meanwhile, all he could do was sit at the kitchen table drinking black coffee and smoking cigarettes, a habit he'd resumed a month after Dorothy disappeared. Occasionally he cast a baleful glance at the toy boxcar Ginny must have left on the table the previous evening after he'd escaped to his room with a murderous headache. Her leaving it there where he'd see it first thing in the morning clearly belied all her easy talk about bearing him no malice for that act of betrayal thirty years ago.

Presently, he heard her clomping down the stairs. She breezed into the room wearing a long, garishly flowered robe. "Did you think I'd croaked in my sleep?" she asked brightly. "I should have warned you, I'm a late riser. But you'll soon get used to all my quirks and foibles. Mmm, the coffee smells good." She poured herself a cup and helped herself to a stale doughnut, then sat down facing him across the table.

He was in no mood to be put off with small talk. "Isn't it time you told me what happened?"

Her slippery, doglike eyes feigned innocence. "What are you talking about?"

"Obviously none of the terrible things I imagined ever happened to you. You didn't lose your memory—you weren't kidnaped or murdered. You didn't starve to death. Someone must have found you not long after you got trapped in that boxcar. You *were* trapped in there, I assume?"

She pinched the doughnut between her fingers, made a face, dunked it in her coffee. "Oh, I was trapped, all right. I woke up when the door was slammed shut. I didn't panic. Hell, I was always a gutsy kid, you know that. Not one of those namby-pambies scared of the dark. I figured you'd tell 'em I was in there and they'd have me out in no time at all. Not that I didn't get a funny feeling in my

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tummy when the train began to move. I just sat down and munched on bananas and waited for it to stop.

"It seemed to roll on forever and I started to get excited. Hell, it was an adventure, wasn't it? When it did finally stop, God knows where, I must have been snoozing, because when I woke up the door was partway open but not a soul in sight. So I climbed out, wondering where in hell I was. Would you believe Cincinnati? Then I got to thinking about dear old Mom and Pop and how they must have been out of their gourds wondering what happened to little Ginny. That tickled me. Anyhow, to make a long story short, I took off to see the sights. Met up with this eighteen-year-old drifter named Buford B. Hayes—they called him BeeBee—and little Ginny was off and running. She never looked back."

The story was worlds away from anything Richard had ever imagined. It hadn't once occurred to him, despite all the newspaper articles and TV documentaries about teenage runaways, that Ginny might have joined that nameless gypsy legion.

"But didn't you ever want to come home, or let anyone know where you were?"

Ginny sipped her coffee reflectively and reached for another doughnut. "Not really. Oh, there were good times and there were bad times, but on balance I was pretty lucky."

"Lucky! While I was having nightmares?"

"Wicked Dickie. I couldn't believe it when I read those old newspaper pieces and found out you must not have said a word about knowing I was trapped in that boxcar."

"I kept thinking someone would find you. Then later, when there was all that fuss, I was too scared to say anything."

"Naughty boy, you. Never told a soul. Just left me in that smelly old boxcar to die for all you knew. But don't feel bad. You did me a favor in a way. What's done is done, right? My hubby's dead and Dorothy's gone. It's just you and me now, Dickie."

The panic started to rise again. "But, Ginny, you can't stay here."

Her eyebrows shot up. "Why not?" She grinned slyly. "Oh, I get it. Afraid of what folks'll say? No problem. We'll just say I'm an old friend of the family who's come to take care of you."

Richard's jaw tightened. "I don't *need* anyone to take care of me. I don't *want* anyone. Except Dorothy."

Ginny sighed. "You better face up to it, Dickie. Little Dorothy, she's not ever coming back."

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"You don't know that."

She giggled. "Maybe I'm psychic."

They were still sitting there when the phone rang. Richard went into the other room to answer it and came back looking white with strain.

"Another one."

"Another what?"

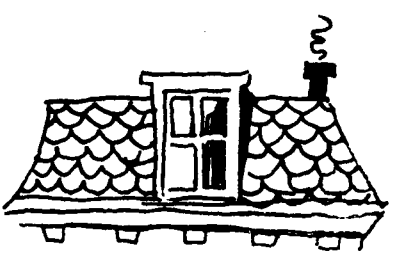
"God, why must they keep torturing me? Twice already they've dragged me off to look at some poor woman's corpse, thinking it might be Dorothy's. This time a body's been found in a well on an abandoned farm outside Sugar Grove."

"In a well? How'd they happen to find it?"

"Something about an anonymous tip. Some woman called the sheriff's office early yesterday. Wouldn't give her name."

Ginny's eyes expanded in a look of exaggerated horror. "In a well! Can you beat that? Makes your skin crawl, don't it, terrible things people do. To think someone must have dumped her in that dark well and then just walked away. Just walked away and left her there to die."

Richard looked away, not daring to meet her gaze, afraid the look in her eyes might match a certain disquieting undertone in her voice. The vision that crossed his mind was too frightfully bizarre to bear thinking about. Ginny put down her cup and reached for the toy boxcar, not picking it up but only moving it back and forth on the table. As if hypnotized, Richard's eyes followed it. Back and forth, back and forth, back and forth.



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a *NEW* Maynard Bullock story by

JAMES POWELL

The Dawson City ice rink Bullock frequented as a boy was inside a large unheated shed. On either side of the entrance were dressing rooms where men and women went separately to change in and out of their skates or to warm their feet. As everywhere in Canada, the men's dressing room was headquarters for the hot-stove league, a swell bunch of oldsters given to standing around with their backs to the potbellied stove, hogging the heat and swapping stories of days gone by, including a good dose of the exploits of the Men in Scarlet. Soon Bullock was spending more time in the dressing room than on the ice. And had traded his dream of hockey stardom for weak ankles and a Mountie's life of adventure . . .

THE HOT-STOVE LEAGUE

by JAMES POWELL

Acting Sergeant Maynard Bullock of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police had a theory that you never really knew another man until you discovered whom he was doing an imitation of. One evening, deep into an episode of BBC Television's *Mannerly of the Yard,* a program he watched to stay abreast of the investigative side of policework, it came to him like a thunderclap that for some months now Inspector Peter LaPierre, his immediate superior, had been doing an imitation of Police Inspector Childers Mannerly.

This revelation made Bullock groan out loud, for Mannerly, who popped down from London in a flowery waistcoat every week to solve some mystery among the hedgerows, the churchyards, and the eccentrics of rural England, spent much of each show making a fool of his bumbling driver, Constable Enoch Broadrib. As this week's

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episode ended, Broadrib has been left all night huddled under an umbrella guarding an empty cemetery plot while Mannerly and Lord Rounders sip whiskeys-and-water by a cozy fire, listening to the rain lash the windowpane and sputtering with laughter at the poor mutt's plight. Blast it, Bullock had hoped LaPierre's taking him out on cases meant his career on the Force was back in the fast lane. Now it looked like the Inspector just wanted someone to play Broadrib to his Mannerly.

Bullock heaved himself to his feet and clumped down the cellar steps. He'd promised good old Mavis, his wife, that he'd shovel the walk. From atop a chest in the corner by his workbench, he took the fur hat with earflaps, the fur gloves with gauntlets, and the short fur coat which, years before everything bloated into down-filled this and down-filled that, had been standard winter issue for the Force.

Bullock was proud of his old fur coat and often wore it to Mountie social functions in cold weather. Good old Mavis called it putting on the dog. Actually it was coyote. But the dog crack wasn't too far wrong. Bullock's dogless childhood might well account for his affection for the coat. Often when he sat at his workbench pondering some new invention, the heap of fur in the corner would seem to stir and stare at him with affectionate brown eyes. "Good boy, good boy," Bullock would murmur in a comforting voice.

Outside, the night was clear and very cold. The day-long snow had ended just after supper, leaving a foot and a half accumulation. Now the wind was picking up. Ottawa names its winds. Bullock sniffed the air, judging this one had the makings of a China Clipper, an icy blast that could knock handles off teacups.

Bullock shoveled the walk and the sidewalk, adding to the considerable rampart of snow that already fortified the gutter. Then he looked around carefully. When he was sure no one was watching, he stuck the shovel upright in the snow, clasped his hands behind his back, and skated the length of the cleared sidewalk and back again on the soles of his boots. Then he set about shoveling the sidewalk of their neighbor, old Mrs. Marcy.

Bullock could not iceskate. This darkest of all Canadian secrets he also attributed to youthful circumstance. He had been raised by an aunt who operated a boarding house for young women in Dawson City in the Yukon. Most Saturdays in winter, his aunt's boarders would make an outing to the municipal ice rink and drag Bullock behind them on bobskates as they skated around the ice. Bullock,

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who dreamed of hockey stardom, was counting on this regimen to give him a skater's strong ankles. But the young women quickly paired off with one or another of their many beaus, leaving him on his own.

Bullock quickly had his fill of teeters, staggers, and falls. The rink was inside a large unheated shed. On either side of the entrance were dressing rooms where men and women went separately to change in and out of their skates or to warm their feet. As everywhere in Canada, the men's dressing room was headquarters for the hot-stove league, a swell bunch of oldsters given to standing around with their backs to the potbellied stove, hogging the heat and swapping stories of days gone by, including a good dose of the exploits of the Men in Scarlet. Soon Bullock was spending more time in the dressing room than on the ice. And had traded his dream of hockey stardom for weak ankles and a Mountie's life of adventure.

Bullock was halfway down the Widow Marcy's sidewalk when he heard good old Mavis call to him over the wind. She was standing on their front porch, holding a fist to her ear like a telephone.

LaPierre's last words before hanging up were, "And, damn it, come as you are!" for he objected to Bullock's wearing his beloved scarlet tunic every chance he got. Now sliding into the passenger's seat, the Inspector groaned audibly at Bullock's fur coat. But all he said was, "Pop around to the Finnish Embassy chop-chop."

Bullock pulled away from the curb smiling inwardly, like a man to whom all things were now clear. Yes, Mannerly explained all of LaPierre's recent "popping arounds," his "toddles," his waistcoats, and his "cherribees."

After a few blocks, LaPierre said, "Now listen up, Bullock. This diplomatic stuff can be a sticky wicket. But Mrs. LaPierre's boy Peter intends to solve the case in jig time. So what say you stay out of the way and keep your big fat mouth shut. You might even learn something. Now here's the poop. Earlier this evening somebody murdered the Finnish Ambassador and his country's Minister of Mines and Forests while they romped around stark naked in the snow in the embassy back yard." Eyes wide with fear, LaPierre grabbed for the dashboard, shouting, "Eyes on the road, you twit!" (Mountie Directive Ninety-Four, "Regarding the Use of Proper Language When Addressing Subordinates," had done much to temper LaPierre's language, listing as it did unacceptable words from "ass" to "yahoo.")

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"Righty-o, Inspector," said Bullock in his best Broadribbian fashion, and with quickened pulse he drove on through the cold and increasingly windy night.

The Finnish housekeeper wore her steel-grey hair in a bun and smelled of small cigars. LaPierre swept by her into the embassy vestibule, stripping off his overcoat as he came and, without looking, tossing it over his shoulder. Bullock, having seen Mannerly do the same thing several times, was there to make a Broadrib catch. The arrival of the embassy's security man halfway into his own overcoat somewhat lessened LaPierre's grand gesture.

"Arvid Torkel," the security man said as though his name were bad tidings and extended his hand to LaPierre. "We spoke on the phone."

"Peter LaPierre," replied the Inspector. "And this—" he turned to find Bullock admiring a bronze bust of Jean Sibelius in a niche below the gilt-and-white staircase "—art lover is my trusty motor-wallah, Bullock."

Bullock answered Torkel's nod with a smart salute.

"I was going to suggest you keep your coats until I've walked you through the whole terrible, terrible business," said the Finn. Torkel's mournful eyes were set in a perfectly bald head. But just as Mother Nature—God bless her, thought Bullock—compensates for a shortage in one place with abundance in another, the man's eyebrows were jutting black thickets whole colonies of birds could have nested in.

Bullock helped the muttering LaPierre on with his coat again, then fell in behind as the security man led the way to the back of the house.

Over his shoulder Torkel said, "True exterminite's great potential for pest control has long been known. But until our extensive new Karelian finds, the supply was inadequate. I agree with your suggestion over the phone that the contenders for the exclusive rights to these deposits must be our principal suspects, to wit: Comrade Korrf of Red Flag Brand Exterminating Products, Herr von Trapp of Death Trap Industries, the American Eli Whitney Grimaldi of the Grim Reaper Corporation, and your own Austen Davey of Silver Bullet, Ltd., who seemed to have the inside track."

Davey was one of those rags-to-riches stories Bullock admired so much. An orphan who grew up kicking around lumber camps all over Northern Ontario and Quebec, the man had parleyed a plywood

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gardening-clogs empire into one of the world's largest rat-and-pest-control operations.

"Now, of course, negotiations will have to be reopened," continued Torkel, "which may explain why everyone was agreeable to joining us here tonight. Yes, exterminite's quite a little mineral. The merest pinch dropped into water converts to a gas that destroys every living thing it comes in contact with by a process of desiccation. Evacuate your building of people and pets, bring on the exterminite, and, presto, every fly, flea, roach, mouse, and rat is literally turned into harmless dust. Within fifteen minutes the gas has dissipated and the residents can return."

The Finn led them through a small room containing a bench and a line of pegs for hanging clothes and into a larger wood-lined room with a small bleacher of benches. On a corner shelf was another bust of Sibelius. (I wonder why they call them busts? wondered Bullock.) In another corner on a tiled platform was an iron boxlike apparatus filled with large stones. Torkel said, "Tonight the Ambassador and our Minister of Mines and Forests were to meet with Mr. Davey here in the sauna to continue negotiations."

"A naked business meeting, you say?" asked LaPierre, trying to make the question sound urbane. But he was shocked enough to exchange raised eyebrows with Bullock.

Torkel saw the look and sighed. "You can't beat it for security," he assured them. "The electronic bug hasn't been invented that can take moist heat like that. And try bringing in a wire. Besides, nakedness breaks down inhibitions. So does flogging each other with birch branches." Torkel saw the look again. "Oh, it's all quite jolly," he insisted. "And as I told the Ambassador, who'd been walking around the last few days like something was weighing heavily on his mind, a sauna and a roll in the snow are a real tonic when it comes to chasing away the blues."

"Did the Ambassador think his life was in danger?" suggested LaPierre.

Torkel shrugged. "More likely acute midwinter depression. You know how it gets. The feeling that spring will never come, that no folded flower will ever escape the earth's chill grip. During these long dark days, the Northern soul wrestles with cosmic questions and challenges the universe itself. Yes, hoisting the whole burden of mankind onto our shoulders, we stride out onto an existential tightrope stretched across the frozen void."

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Bullock was all ears. The Northern soul? Existential tightrope? By godfrey, he loved talk like that.

"In these too brief days, we Finns find ourselves drawn to the dark riddles of blood and nation such as why fire engines are red."

"Don't you people have television?" demanded LaPierre. But then, as if remembering what sticky wickets these diplomatic cases could be, he said more pleasantly, "My dear Torkel, please continue with the events of this evening."

"Well, when Mr. Davey arrived I ushered him and the Ambassador and the Minister into the dressing room out there and waited while they undressed. I can assure you, Mr. Davey took nothing but his birthday suit into the sauna. Then I went up to my room to ponder a bit. After twenty minutes or so I heard whooping and shouting outside and knew it was roll-in-the-snow time. Then came two pistol shots. I rushed downstairs and found Mr. Davey over here by the outside door with a horrified look on his face."

Torkel now led them out into the garden, where a light above the door illuminated the trampled wreckage of snow the morgue boys and the police had left behind. Bullock clucked at the clues that might have been. Some time ago, in a letter to *The Scarlet Trumpet*, the Mountie in-house magazine, he had suggested the use of needle-like stilts in the investigation of snowy scenes-of-the-crime.

Raising his voice against the wind, Torkel said, "The way Mr. Davey tells it, the Ambassador and the Minister made their dash for the door and a tumble in the snow. Before Davey could get his courage up and follow, he heard shots. He reached the door just in time to see a figure go over the wall." Torkel pointed to a place atop the ten-foot stone wall where the cap of snow had been swept away. Directly beneath it were two short sets of tracks coming and going that vanished into the confusion of police footprints.

At the bloody snowbank where the bodies had been found, Torkel paused only long enough to spread his hands helplessly. Then he led them over to a large block of black marble set about ten feet out from the wall and topped with another, larger-than-life bust of Sibelius. Torkel indicated the spot at the base of a nearby tree where they'd found the .38 and a right-hand glove. "Now that glove, that's a puzzlement," said Torkel.

LaPierre smiled into the teeth of the gale. "Such things will become clear in time," he promised cryptically.

"What I mean is, well, the gun, yes. But in this kind of weather, who'd throw a glove away?" explained Torkel. "Sounds like someone

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who wouldn't have time to wipe off the fingerprints but couldn't be seen wearing a glove because he was naked."

LaPierre laughed condescendingly. "As another great detective, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, would say, 'Naked is the best disguise,' eh, Torkel?"

A while back Bullock had come across an old scribbler from Mountie Academy days containing his Makeup and Disguise notes. In one class on the topic "Disguise and National Identity" this same quotation had come up, and it had been generally agreed that naked wasn't the best disguise in Canada, not in winter, not in black-fly season. Afterward the instructor had dictated the full quotation and corrected them on the source. After rediscovering the quotation, Bullock had spent a week of guarding the flowerbeds in front of the Parliament buildings memorizing it, hoping to drop it into a conversation one day and watch people sit up and take notice. He knew he should keep his mouth shut but, by godfrey, he'd never get a better chance than this.

"Actually, it's from William Congreve's *The Double-Dealer,* Inspector," he said. " 'No mask like open truth to cover lies/As to go naked is the best disguise.' "

LaPierre glared, his lips moving quickly and silently. He was, Bullock knew, reciting the Mountie Directive Ninety-Four list from "ass" to "yahoo" under his breath.

When LaPierre came to the end of the list, he turned back to Torkel, nodded at the upturned cardboard box sitting on the bench in front of the block of black marble, and asked, "And is this the mark on the snow you described on the phone?" Lifting the box, he handed it to Torkel, who passed it back to Bullock. By sitting on the bench, someone had impressed the letters ETNA within a sunburst of straight lines on the snow.

"That mark really had me buffaloed," said LaPierre. He paused to turn up his coat collar before adding, "Until I consulted my Babbage." (*Babbage's Guide to Contemporary Designer-Jean Hip Pockets* had recently become an important part of any modern police library.)

Torkel looked impressed. "Ah, was that why you called back to have me ask our suspects to wear jeans?" he asked. "Babbage. I knew there was something familiar about that mark."

"Actually, it isn't in the current Babbage," admitted LaPierre. "But even that tells us something. Not only does our murderer wear designer jeans, but he keeps well abreast of the latest styles."

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"If the murderer wore jeans, that rules out Mr. Davey," said Torkel. "So how do we explain the glove?"

Sleet had started to fall. LaPierre paused to sweep some from the shoulders of Torkel's overcoat. "It was left behind to frame Davey," he said. "Now let's see what more the mark can tell us about the murderer. Don't those straight lines make you think of sunny Italy? And just where is Mount Etna?"

"Sicily?" remembered Torkel.

LaPierre nodded and the two policemen exchanged knowing looks.

Bullock waited, his knowing look at the ready, but no one glanced back at him. Blast, he thought, for he also knew that Eli Whitney (Bugs) Grimaldi, heir to a farm-machinery fortune and a Mafia empire, had gone into the extermination business to show old money and the mob that he could succeed on his own.

LaPierre snapped his fingers impatiently. Bullock passed the box to Torkel, who handed it to LaPierre, who covered the mark again. Then the Inspector said, "Yes, my dear Torkel, I rather think this whole business can be cleared up quickly, and with enough glory for both of us."

"I hope," said Torkel doubtfully. Then, pointing at the drawing-room windows, he added, "Look, Herr von Trapp, the last of our suspects, has just arrived."

"Then let's toddle in, shall we?" suggested LaPierre. But when Bullock tried to toddle after them, LaPierre wheeled around and barked, "You stay out here and guard the evidence. You're damn well dressed for it." Then LaPierre fell in step with the Finn. "Torkel," he asked, "have you been here long enough to experience a sleet storm we call Auld Clootie's Scouring Pad?"

Bullock shuddered. By godfrey, could it be Auld Clootie, a fearsome sleety blast capable of removing warts, pockmarks, and moles, sand off wrinkles, and leave the skin as smooth and pink as a baby's bottom? Bullock, like most Mounties, treasured and nurtured each hint of cragginess or the rugged outdoors about the face and dreaded duty when Auld Clootie blew, even though it was then that criminals turned out in droves, wearing gloves with the tips cut away because they believed the sleet could alter fingerprints.

Close inside the drawing-room windows, flames danced gaily in a free-standing fireplace. So near and yet so far, thought Bullock. Then he turned his attention to LaPierre, whom Torkel was introducing to the suspects. After his handshake with the American, the

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Russian, and the German, LaPierre found an excuse to go down on one knee—to tie a shoelace, to admire the beading in a table edge, to retrieve a dropped pencil—using the moment to glance over at the hip pockets of the man's jeans. His disappointed look said he hadn't found the mark he was looking for. Of course, the Canadian still wore the three-piece suit he'd arrived in earlier that evening.

LaPierre invited everyone to sit down, then took up his position standing in the curve of the grand piano. Onto that instrument's glossy wood he lay his wristwatch, his pipe and tobacco pouch, and his box of wooden matches. Then he gave his audience a superior smile and spread his jacket open by putting his hands on his hips, displaying his bright vest as a peacock might its tail. This, of course, was pure Childers Mannerly.

Bullock watched LaPierre's lips move. In a minute he saw the others burst into laughter and knew the Inspector had started with the joke prescribed in this year's edition of the Mountie interrogation manual to put suspects at their ease. Some claimed an astute reading of these jokes would reveal the thrust of Canadian foreign policy for the year. Bullock wondered what they'd get out of this year's story about the chicken, the drunken tentmaker, and the three-legged table.

LaPierre now moved on to describe the history of the Force from its institution in 1869 to the present, highlighting the Sitting Bull business, the Lost Patrol, and the Mountie contingent at the coronation of King George VI. Bullock couldn't actually hear the words. Still, they warmed him. In cases involving the less sophisticated—the Indians, metis, and Eskimo—this was the point where the murderer would shrug, step forward, and give himself up.

Bullock scrutinized the faces on the other side of the glass. The swarthy, handsome American *Time* magazine described as possessing "ruthless bedroom eyes," the chunky Russian who even in casual clothes looked so ill-at-ease you had to believe the flaw in the Russian character was more than just bad tailoring, the German sitting behind his mask of neckless avuncularity, and the Canadian, all greying-at-the-temples elegance, bearing himself with that quiet dignity which had prompted St. Barbe Weston, Bullock's favorite thinker-author, to describe Canada as "a nation of kings in exile." No, there'd be no such easy victory from this sophisticated crew.

So Bullock understood when LaPierre moved on to a reenactment of the murder, becoming the two steaming naked men running happily out into the snow, becoming the murderer sitting in ambush on

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the bench, becoming the victims again, sad-eyed now as in their last dying moment they recognize the culprit. LaPierre lay a hand on his heart as if to show the place where the bullets had gone. Remembering the man's Mountie Academy Drama Club tie, Bullock was ready to bet his next paycheck that the Inspector would repeat this same gesture to the heart when he came to speak of the remorse that would feed on the murderer's heart until he set himself to rights with the laws of God and man. But before LaPierre could get that far, he saw Grimaldi pull out a pack of cigarettes. The Inspector's lips formed the word "Catch" and he tossed the box of wooden matches to the American.

Bullock nodded approvingly. The Inspector wanted to find out if Grimaldi was right-handed. The American caught the box, lit his cigarette, and, thinking the Russian was about to light up, too, tossed him the matches. But the surprised Russian, a non-smoker who had only been reaching for his handkerchief, thought it was some kind of game. He tossed the box over to Austen Davey. The Canadian started to pass the box to the German, but when he saw LaPierre move to intercept he tossed it to the American. The suspects were all on their feet now and had formed a rough circle with LaPierre in the middle. The Inspector jumped again and again, trying to catch the matchbox the others tossed among themselves and just out of his reach. Torkel looked on like some spectator at a Greek tragedy.

Bullock shook his head. Clearly LaPierre had lost control of the interrogation. He missed an easy teasing pass that set his lower lip to trembling. But just then the Finnish housekeeper arrived with steaming coffee and hot muffins. The game broke up for refreshments. LaPierre had been saved by the bell.

The suspects slapped palms all around—all right! Then they helped themselves to the eats and sat down together, quite obviously looking forward to the renewal of the interrogation. Visibly shaken, LaPierre armed himself with a cup of coffee and a buttered muffin and came over to the window where Bullock was doing a little dance to keep the blood circulating. The Inspector stood there, making much of blowing to cool his coffee and smacking his lips over the muffin, his spirits rising each time the sleet storm rattled the panes. Well, Bullock couldn't begrudge the man that. In the second half of the interrogation, LaPierre would have his work cut out for him.

Yes, the Inspector would use the smoking stem of the pipe dismissively like a machete to clear his way through the culprit's flimsy

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web of lies. Then it would become a playful epee, tweaking the villain's psychological weaknesses before the final rapier thrust to the heart of the matter.

Bullock had hopes of one day inventing the perfect interrogation pipe. It would be a briar, of course, a bulldog something like the Swiss Army pipe, but instead of a fold-out reamer, tamper, and lighter, Bullock's would sport a small magnifying glass, tweezers for picking up small bits of evidence, a whisk for dusting for fingerprints, and a whistle built into the mouthpiece for summoning the officers to take away the whimpering criminal when the case was solved. Bullock dreamed that someday his Royal Canadian Mounted Police pipe would be standard issue for the Force, maybe not for Joe Mountie but certainly for everyone with the rank of Acting Sergeant and above.

Bullock's only fear was that LaPierre's pipe, one of those metal jobbies with a blue-leather bowl, was up to the job ahead. It was, if the truth were told, a sissy pipe, a Childers Mannerly kind of thing.

LaPierre finished his coffee and returned to the piano. The moment of truth was at hand. As Bullock watched, the Inspector filled his pipe while simultaneously fixing the others in the room with a contemptuous stare. Then he struck a match and lit the pipe. Bullock's eyes crossed in sympathy. LaPierre lit the pipe with great care and concentration, tossing the burned-out match over his shoulder. By the time he was done, the room had fallen silent and all eyes were on him.

LaPierre put the smoking pipe between his teeth, shot his cuffs, retrieved the pipe with his right hand, and, using the stem of the pipe as his instrument, began to sketch the details of the case in the air. The room was sitting forward now, staring at LaPierre's pipe. Suddenly LaPierre swung around on his heels and thrust the pipe stem at Grimaldi. Whatever the question, it made the surprised American stutter, squirm, and try to avert his eyes. LaPierre lunged again with outstretched pipe and another question. This could be it, thought Bullock admiringly. This could be it.

But in the next moment, everyone had turned to look at the German, who from a leather case had taken out a wonderful Alsatian pipe with a stem that dropped straight down to a porcelain knuckle and then rose up again at a slight angle to a decorated porcelain bowl with a silver lid. Von Trapp filled the bowl and lit it, without taking his eyes off LaPierre. But the other suspects and Torkel moved closer to admire the pipe and its decoration. LaPierre tried

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to recapture his audience with frantic pipe jabs and thrusts. But he'd clearly been outgunned by the German.

While researching his interrogation pipe, Bullock had spent many a quiet Saturday afternoon among the display cases of the Narghile Museum, which was housed in a dusty little building on the fringe of Ottawa's Arab quarter. The museum had a fine collection of decorated Alsatians. This one looked like a pipe along the lines of one of the museum sets called The Seven Deadly Sins. From the men's smirks and the nudges, Bullock suspected the sin they saw depicted wasn't Gluttony.

Stamping his foot, the red-faced LaPierre threw his pipe into the corner sulkily and then stalked after it with one hand on his hip and the other buried deep in his hair.

Ashamed of the botch LaPierre was making of things, Bullock left the window and started walking in a circle around the garden. The wind had picked up and the sleet felt like sand across his face. He heard it hiss over the cardboard box. Pulling down the earflaps and the visor on his cap, he buried his chin in his coat collar and slapped his arms across his body. By godfrey, it was cold.

He thought of Dawson City winters and the sharp ache of snow under mitt elastic and the way the elastic of the second mitt tasted when you bit into it to pull it on. Then he remembered the two distinct smells of his childhood: leather mitts with wet elastic drying on the radiators in the school cloakroom and the scorched seat-of-the-pants odor the hot-stove leaguers always carried around with them. Sooner or later, jockeying around, trying to get the lion's share of the warm, an oldster would back into the stove. How the others would whoop and holler! Bullock smiled.

Yes, long before designer jeans came down the pike with their fancied-up hip pockets, the hot-stove leaguers wore identifying marks on the seats of their pants. Still, it could've been worse. Bullock remembered all the stories of the damage naked lumberjacks could do to themselves on cold winter mornings jostling to get their clothes on around the potbellied stove.

Bullock stopped in his tracks. Reaching his hand through the fur of his upturned collar, he ran a thoughtful, gloved knuckle along his icy moustache. Duffy Stove and Boiler had had a corner on the potbellied stoves so common in the North. Bullock remembered the company motto: "A Summer Day Captured in Iron." It was all coming back to him now. Old man Duffy had married in the same year Krakatoa erupted. The year without a summer, they called it, be-

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cause the volcanic ash blocked out the sun. It had done wonders for Duffy's business and he'd vowed to name all his children after volcanoes, calling his oldest boy Vesuvius. Vesuvius Duffy, now there was a handle! But what did he name his daughter, the one he called his smaller stove model after? Bullock squinted until his mind's eye conjured up the little door with the model name in raised nickel-plated letters within a sunburst. Etna!

Bullock started for the back door. But after three long strides he stopped. By godfrey, no. LaPierre got himself into this mess, let him get himself out. Bullock smiled from behind his fur collar and returned to the window with a bit of a swagger in his step. "Tell me to butt out, eh? Call me a motor-wallah, will he?" Bullock laughed darkly and, crossing his arms, studied the scene within. LaPierre was still standing in the corner, face to the wall, pretending not to hear the taunts the others were shouting at him, or the laughter as Von Trapp used his wonderful pipe to mock the jabs and thrusts of the Inspector's sissy one.

Bullock stamped his feet and watched, savoring every minute. He even made a megaphone of his hands and shouted a couple of things himself. And by godfrey it felt good. Now the Russian had the Canadian and the American in stitches by walking around with a mincing step, his hands on his hips like LaPierre showing off his waistcoat. Torkel looked on sadly, like a sensitive man watching his brother being dragged down by inescapable circumstance.

Yes, things had certainly gotten out of hand inside, but it was no skin off Bullock's nose. He watched for another minute. Then—"Blast and double blast!"—he plodded off toward the back door. Was it the camaraderie of the Force, the sight of another Mountie in trouble, that at last compelled him to go inside? Or was it his deep commitment to justice and the rule of law? Or was it perhaps the sight of the housekeeper arriving with fresh coffee and muffins?

The housekeeper was standing in the drawing-room door with the empty tray, watching the developments inside. She gave a start when she saw Bullock, looking like an apparition of ice and snow, standing beside her. Then she recognized him and, reaching over, she stroked the sleeve of his fur coat admiringly. "Good boy, good boy," she said.

Bullock kept up his *psssting* noises until LaPierre noticed and summoned him with a crooked finger. LaPierre grunted with growing interest to Bullock's whispering and then rushed over to confer

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with Torkel. Bullock used the chance to sidle coffee-and-muffinward, but LaPierre spotted him halfway and ordered him back outside to guard the evidence.

Blast! thought Bullock.

"Blast!" repeated Bullock, standing in the snow outside the drawing-room windows again, Auld Clootie howling around him. On the other side of the glass, LaPierre, having persuaded Torkel to take away Von Trapp's pipe at gunpoint, had recaptured the grudging attention of his audience and returned to his reenactment of the crime.

Having shot down the naked men as they rush from the sauna, the murderer stands up. "But, lo, what is this?" LaPierre seemed to be saying, his eyes big with discovery. "What is this mark left behind on the snowy bench?" (Here LaPierre gestured to Torkel, who escorted the housekeeper from the room and closed the door.) The Inspector looked down and scratched his head quizzically. Then his face lit up and he snapped his fingers. Using both hands to describe a potbellied stove, he made a little rumba bump and slapped his buttock.

Jaws fell open all around. LaPierre spoke for a moment before tapping his belt buckle and pointing at each suspect in turn. But the German made some answer back and, tapping his belt buckle, pointed at LaPierre and Torkel. Nodding in vigorous agreement, the other suspects folded their arms and waited. The Inspector and the Finn looked at each other, shrugged, and reached for their belt buckles.

But just before pants started dropping all around, Austen Davey snatched up a bust of Sibelius from somewhere and pitched it at a drawing-room window. Bullock saw it coming and backpedaled as fast as he could. As the glass shattered, he remembered thinking, So that's why they call those things busts. Davey followed after Sibelius in a grand leap and hit the snow running.

Suddenly it was the hockey game of Bullock's dreams. There was superstar Austen (The Silver Bullet) Davey skating down the ice with the puck. Only defenseman Maynard Bullock stood between him and the goal. Only Bullock could save the day. But Davey had the momentum. If Bullock stepped straight into him, the guy would skate right over him. There was only one thing for Bullock to do. When he reached the stone bench, he stopped going backward. He moved sideways left, right, and then left again, hoping to sucker

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Davey into trying to slip between him and the block of black marble. Then Bullock would shoulder him into it, scoop up the loose puck, stickhandle his way down the ice, and score the winning goal, making the Trusty Blades the first Mountie team to win the Stanley Cup!

At just the right moment Bullock threw himself sideways with all his force. But Davey had a plan of his own, and a split second before he reached Bullock he put it into effect. His escape route led from the stone bench up onto the marble block and from there onto the composer's bronze shoulder. There, he intended to leap up, catch an overhanging tree limb, and, swinging hand over hand from limb to limb, reach the wall and drop down to freedom. But Auld Clootie had made Sibelius a treacherous bit of artwork. As Davey leaped for the tree, his feet slipped out from under him and he came crashing back down onto the generous bronze forehead.

Bullock, lying in the snow, dazed from his encounter with the black-marble pedestal, heard the crisp snap of bones breaking. No, that's why they call it a bust, he vaguely remembered telling himself just before the full weight of Davey's body hit him.

Each solemn-faced above his healthy glass of rye and water, Inspector LaPierre and Arvid Torkel sat before the drawing-room fireplace. Not four feet away on the other side of the window, Auld Clootie's Scouring Pad raged. Torkel reread the telegram he had received from Helsinki a few minutes before, then crushed the paper into a ball and threw it into the flames. "Two men dead and a third charged with premeditated murder, and all over what?" he demanded mournfully. "Over the largest deposit of fool's exterminite in the world." He gave a deep sigh. "Well, I guess it's back to swatting flies."

"It doesn't change a thing, you know," insisted LaPierre. "When the dead men decided to recommend to your government that the deposits go undeveloped forever, they thought they were talking true exterminite. But why would anyone make a recommendation like that? Tell me. I mean, did they really think anybody'd be crazy enough to use exterminite for military purposes?" The Inspector took a pull from his drink before adding sarcastically, "Oh, sure, like dump the damn stuff out of a plane over a major urban center during a rainstorm. Or put it in the enemy's toothpowder. Cut me a break, Torkel."

Torkel looked sheepish. "All I know is we're talking premeditated

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murder here," he said. "When Mr. Davey asked for another meeting after they'd had a few days to reconsider their decision, he knew they weren't going to change their minds. That's why he came over the wall and hid the pistol and glove in the snow under the bench. And when he followed them out of the sauna and into the snow, he did what he intended to do all along: he shot them down like dogs. Premeditated murder."

"Hey, don't get me wrong. I hold no brief for premeditated murder," said LaPierre. "But just between you and me and the lamppost, I've never heard a man justify it better than Davey did just before they loaded him onto the gurney. He saw the Ambassador and the Minister as madmen of the most dangerous stripe. Oh, not the kind who run amok and kill with axe or straight razor. No, they were the gloom-and-doom boys, the crew that never see the doughnut, only the hole, the naysayers who'd kill our hopes and dreams if we'd let them, with all their talk about how the world can never become a better place to live in, how man will never improve."

Torkel started to speak, but LaPierre waved his words away. "No, don't give me any of that Dark Night of the Northern Soul bull, I don't want to hear it. Nobody, I mean nobody, is going to convince Mrs. LaPierre's boy Peter that the wars of this century haven't taught us all a much-needed lesson about man's inhumanity to man."

At that moment a large glazed shape limped out of the sleety darkness and paused on the other side of the glass. As they watched, a furry, icicled thing that might have been a head turned slowly toward them. LaPierre waved the thing on its way. "Keep on toddling, Bullock," he shouted, "keep on toddling. I'll tell you when it's time to pop around with my car." Slowly the shape moved off into the howling night, still favoring the hip onto which the bulk of Austen Davey's weight had come crashing down.

Torkel reached for the whiskey decanter. "I see why they say neither rain nor sleet nor snow nor dark of night can stay you people from the swift completion of your appointed rounds," he said.

"No, that's not us," said LaPierre, stretching out his feet to the fire and holding up his glass to be refilled. "We're the ones who always get our man." He raised his free hand and slowly clenched the fingers into a fist. "And, by God, tonight I've got mine."

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ON OUR COVER

Edward Woodward, Robert McCall in the CBS-TV series, *The Equalizer,* was born in Croydon, Surrey, England. As a schoolboy, he watched the bombing of Croydon Airport by enemy planes on the eve of World War II. His school was hit five times and, for a brief time, he was buried alive. His earliest aspiration was to become a journalist, but a series of roles in college productions inspired a change in career plans, and he later attended the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. In 1955, Woodward made his London stage debut in *Where There's a Will.* His subsequent stage appearances ranged from Shakespearean tours in India, Ceylon, and Australia to such Broadway successes as *Rattle of a Simple Man,* in 1962, for which he won the New York Theater Critics Award.

With wife Michele Dotrice, acclaimed British stage, film, and television actress (daughter of Roy Dotrice, who stars in the CBS series *Beauty and the Beast*), Woodward has performed dramatic readings of poetry, prose, and Shakespeare, and starred in productions of *The Beggar's Opera, Private Lives, The Assassin, Richard III,* and *The Male of the Species.*

Although he has starred in some 2,000 British television productions, Woodward—a performer of unusual versatility—was relatively unknown to American audiences until his portrayal of the doomed Australian officer in the title role in *Breaker Morant.* His other motion pictures include *Beckett, The File of the Golden Goose, Young Winston, The Hunted, The Wicker Man,* and *King David.* His televison credits include the successful British series *Callan* and *Winston Churchill: The Wilderness Years* and the films *A Christmas Carol* and Agatha Christie's *The Man in the Brown Suit.* His recent performances in the Showtime productions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Code Name: Kyril* have won critical acclaim.

The two-time Emmy nominee and 1987 Golden Globe Award winner (for his performance in the title role of *The Equalizer)* is no stranger to action adventure in his personal life: he once was hijacked while flying over Africa. A major recording artist in England and Australia (fourteen albums as a singer and three of poetry), Woodward plays piano, collects antique furniture and antique swords and walking sticks. He has three grown children, Timothy, Peter, and Sarah—all pursuing careers in acting—and five-year-old Emily Beth by Miss Dotrice. He maintains residences in New York City, upstate New York, and England.

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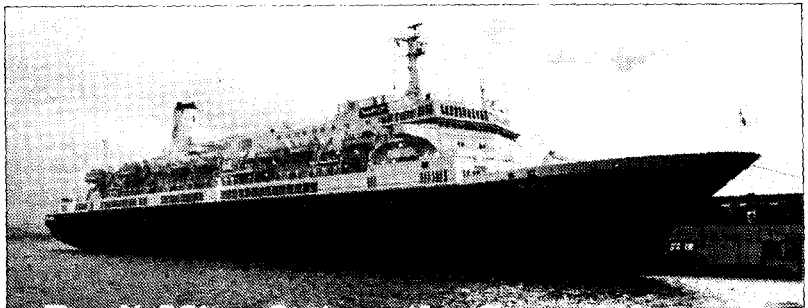

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THE JURY BOX
by JON L. BREEN

There is so much new fiction being published every month in the mystery field, and so much of it of genuine merit, the danger exists that some of the best writers of past years will be forgotten. Happily, some reprint publishers are determined this will not happen.

Aside from its occasional originals, International Polygonics, Ltd. (Madison Square, P.O. Box 1563, New York, NY 10159) continues to revive worthy older titles, package them handsomely, and (most praiseworthy of all) keep them in print. Their Spring-Summer 1989 catalog—itself a collector's item for its witty cartoon cover by Roger Roth and the lable "Strictly low-tech non-Tom Clancy issue" —features new and backlist titles by deceased or retired writers as celebrated and varied as Charlotte Armstrong, Leslie Charteris, Paul Gallico, Anthony Boucher, Jonathan Latimer, Herbert Brean, and Ellery Queen, along with currently active practitioners like George Baxt, Peter Dickinson, E. Richard Johnson, and Margaret Millar.

Some of the IPL books offer new Introductions, giving them special interest for collectors. In introducing Patrick Quentin's 1938 novel *Puzzle for Players* ($5.95), the second adventure of theatrical producer Peter Duluth, Douglas G. Greene sorts out the complicated authorship behind the Quentin, Q. Patrick, and Jonathan Stagge pseudonyms, the most constant member of which was the celebrated playwright and Sondheim librettist Hugh Wheeler. Greene also provides both a Foreword and an Afterword to a new edition of John Dickson Carr's single—and classic—effort in the true-crime vein, *The Murder of Sir Edmund Godfrey* ($12.95), first published in 1936. The 1939 debut of Craig Rice's comedic series about lawyer John J. Malone, *8 Faces at 3* ($5.95), is introduced by William Ruehlmann. More Rice novels are planned for reprint—good news for fans of a once celebrated, long-neglected author.

Meanwhile, the latest Phoebe Atwood Taylor reprints from Foul Play Press ($5.95 each) present a contrast: *Death Lights a Candle* (1932) is the second of the Asey Mayo novels and includes a female Watson to describe the Cape Cod detective's adventures; *Diplomatic Corpse* (1951) is the last in the series and offers the smoother and funnier third-person narration of Taylor's best work. All the Mayos, from whatever period, are well worth reading.

*** Susan Dunlap: *Pious Deception*, Villard, $16.95. Pathologist-turned-private-eye Kiernan O'Shaughnessy investigates the hanging death of an Arizona priest. Was it suicide, kinky sex gone wrong, or murder? Dunlap, who

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can handle action, characterization, and clue-planting with equal skill, is among the most reliable and professional new writers of the past decade. O'Shaughnessy is her third sleuth, joining Berkeley cop Jill Smith and meter-reader Vejay Haskell.

*** Mickey Friedman: *A Temporary Ghost,* Viking, $16.95. In her second case, European-based American journalist Georgia Lee Maxwell accepts a job ghosting a book for an accused murderess and becomes part of the subject's troubled Provence household. The expert evocation of background, the character interplay, and the intense readability (though not the presence of a series sleuth) are reminiscent of Phyllis A. Whitney.

*** Robert Campbell: *Nibbled To Death by Ducks,* Pocket Books, $17.95. Chicago sewer inspector and precinct captain Jimmy Flannery sets out to rescue his "Chinaman" (i.e., political mentor and patron) Delvin from a nursing home, where he was placed by a previously unsuspected relative following the death of his longtime housekeeper. This is the sixth in one of the best new series to debut in the 1980s.

*** H. R. F. Keating: *Dead on Time,* Mysterious, $16.95. The latest Inspector Ghote novel concerns a murder at Bombay's Tick Tock Watchworks and is much preoccupied with clocks, watches, and time. This one ranks no higher than the middle among the seriocomic Indian sleuth's cases, but Ghote is always good company.

*** Michael A. Katz: *Last Dance in Redondo Beach,* Putnam, $17.95. TV sportscaster Andy Sussman and shopping-mall private eye Murray Glick join forces for the second time when a masked wrestler known as Dr. Double-X dies during a team paddleboat race on *Celebrity Network Superteams.* As the summary suggests, humor is Katz's strong suit, and he certainly delivers the laughs, especially in the novel's early stages.

*** Michael Bowen: *Badger Game,* St. Martin's, $17.95. Set in the artistic and legal circles of 1962 New York, this literate mystery draws on both fields for humor, wisdom, and puzzle parts. With all this detailed period piece's other attractions, it includes a first-rate collection of chapter epigraphs, bespeaking a meticulous and patient author.

*** Donald Hamilton: *The Frighteners,* Fawcett Gold Medal, $4.50. The Matt Helm series, which began in 1960 with *Death of a Citizen,* is undoubtedly the longest-lived continuously published, all-paperback-originals series in the crime, mystery, or espionage field. U.S. agent Helm's twenty-fifth adventure, set in Mexico, comprises the mixture as before in action, plotting, population, and philosophy, but even at somewhat longer than optimum length, the recipe never stales in the hands of Hamilton, one of the great storytellers.

** Adam Hall: *Quiller KGB,* Charter, $4.50. In an astonishing manifestation of *glasnost,* the long-standing British intelligence agent known as Quiller joins forces with a Soviet opposite number to head

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off a possible assassination attempt on Gorbachev. Like Hamilton above, Hall (a.k.a. Elleston Trevor) is one of the very best writers of action and intrigue, but this one is too short on plot and too long on angst, making Quiller's scenery-chewing and the quirky flash-forward, back-and-fill narrative style harder to take than usual.

** Melodie Johnson Howe: *The Mother Shadow*, Viking, $16.95. Eccentric Los Angeles private detective Claire Conrad and her new employee Maggie Hill are an acknowledged attempt to create a female equivalent of Nero Wolfe and Archie Goodwin, and not a bad try at all. As a mystery, the book doesn't fulfill the promise of its early chapters, but the characters are interesting enough to invite a second look.

** Ralph McInerny: *Body and Soil*, Atheneum, $17.95. The second case for small-town Indiana attorney Andrew Broom has a promising two-pronged plot with echoes of *Psycho* (not just the shower scene) and a macabre idea for a serial killer: a telephone pitchman who bumps off potential customers whose responses offend him. But once the secondary plot, involving the trial of an apparently self-confessed child murderer, is resolved, interest drops—McInerny's characters aren't involving enough for the inverted or pure-suspense forms to work.

** Jacqueline Babbin: *Bloody Soaps*, International Polygonics, $17.95. The much-hated producer of the soap opera *Key to Life* is done in with a knitting needle on the set. There are too many characters—the two-page cast list helps—and actor-handsome ex-cop Clovis Kelley is a bit of a blank as a sleuth, but the well observed TV background is a plus. The summaries of the show's plot by a teenage receptionist and soap buff are very enjoyable.

All collectors of Sherlockiana will want to own *Sherlock Holmes by Gaslight* (Fordham University Press, $22.50). Editor Philip A. Shreffler has gathered a generous selection of highlights from the first four decades of the *Baker Street Journal*, which debuted as an elaborate professional quarterly in 1946, was revived as a less ambitious fanzine in 1951, and still exists today as an academic quarterly, published by Fordham. Among the contributors of poems, celebrations, and mock-scholarly essays are the *Journal*'s first two editors, Edgar W. Smith and Julian Wolff, M.D., notable mystery and science-fiction writers Ellery Queen, Vincent Starrett, Fletcher Pratt, Poul Anderson, and Herbert Brean, and Sherlockians otherwise notable (Christopher Morley, Basil Rathbone, T. S. Eliot, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt).

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a ***NEW*** short story by

ANDREW VACHSS

"Here's the deal," the man in the stocking mask told the three men he had covered with the semi-automatic. "One of you killed her, period. I don't find out who did it now, I blow you all away."

"That's not fair," the young guy whined.

"It'll be fair," the gunman said. "If I wanted to kill you all, I wouldn't be wearing this mask."

Andrew Vachss' latest novel is Hard Candy *(Knopf)* . . .

FAMILY RESEMBLANCE

by ***ANDREW VACHSS***

It's easy to find a parking place in the Garment District on a Sunday morning. I locked the Hertzmobile sedan, sweeping the street with my eyes. Empty. A cold hard wind hawked in off the Hudson. I adjusted the black-wool watch cap until it rested against the bridge of my dark glasses, slipped my gloved hands into the side pockets of my grey arctic coat, and started my march.

The back alley was clogged with trash, already picked clean by the army of homeless looking for returnable bottles. A wino was sprawled half out of a packing crate, frozen fluid around his open mouth. Working on being biodegradable.

I found the rust-colored back door. Worked the numbered buttons in the right sequence, checked behind me, and slipped inside. Staircase to my right. One flight down to the basement, four up to the top floor, where they'd be.

My rubber-soled boots were soundless on the metal stairs. I tested each one before I moved up. No hurry.

I heard their voices behind the door. Just murmurs, couldn't make out the words.

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I pulled off the watch cap, pocketed the dark glasses, fitted the dark nylon stocking over my face, the big knot at the top making me look taller. Like the lifts in my boots.

I unsnapped the coat. The Franchi LAW-12 semi-automatic shotgun hung against my stomach, suspended from a rawhide loop around my neck. The barrel was sawed off to fourteen inches, the stock chopped down to a pistol grip. Twelve-gauge magnum, double-O buckshot—four in the clip, one in the chamber. The safety was off. I checked the heavy Velcro brace on my right wrist—the cut-down scattergun kicks hard.

The door wasn't locked. I stepped inside. The voices went silent.

I was in a small room, facing three men, one directly in front of me, one to each side, ledger books open on the small table between them. Their eyes locked on the shotgun like it was the answer to all their questions.

The far tip of the triangle was a fat man with a suety face. White shirt, black suspenders, half-glasses pushed down on his nose. The man on my right was barrel-chested, wearing a red sweatsuit zipped open to show a hairy chest and some gold chains. On my left was a younger guy dressed in one of those slouchy Italian jackets, a pastel T-shirt underneath.

"Put your hands on the table," I told them. The stocking mask pressed against my lips, changing my voice, but they heard me clear enough. Hands went on the table. The guy on my right sported a heavy diamond on his ring finger. The young guy had a wafer-thin watch on his wrist.

I let the scattergun drift in a soft arc, covering them all, letting them feel the calm.

"There's no money here today," the fat guy said, just a slight tremor in his voice. It wasn't his first stickup.

"Shut up," I told him, not raising my voice.

"What is this?" the heavyset one asked.

"I ask the questions, you answer them," I told him.

"And then?"

"And then I kill one of you."

"Why?" the young guy squeaked.

"That little girl, the one they found strangled in the basement a couple of months ago. They found her when this joint opened up on a Monday morning. You three meet here every Sunday. To cook the books, play games with the IRS, whatever. It doesn't matter. One of you killed her."

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"The cops already checked that out," the fat man said.

"I'm not the cops."

"Look, pal—" the guy to my right said.

"I'm not your pal. Here's the deal. One of you killed her, period—I got no time to argue about it. I don't find out who did it now, in this room, I blow you all away. Then I'm sure."

"That's not fair," the young guy whined.

"It'll be fair," I said. "If I wanted to kill you all, I wouldn't be wearing this mask. Now, who likes little girls?" I asked all three of them.

No answer.

"Last chance," I said, not moving.

The fat guy's eyes shifted to his left. Just a flicker. I pinned the guy with the gold chains. "You keep magazines in a desk drawer?" I asked him.

His face went white. "It's not what you think. I'm straight—you ask anyone."

I watched his face shake, waiting.

"It's not me! Ask Markie—ask him about where he was a couple a years ago!"

"That wasn't for anything violent!" the young guy yelled, sweat popping out on his face. "I just liked to look."

"In windows?" I asked him.

"I was—sick. But I'm okay now. I see a therapist and everything. Right, Uncle Manny? Tell him!"

Manny nodded. "Markie wouldn't hurt anyone." Veins of contempt in his fat voice.

"How about you?"

"Me! What do I want with little girls? I take a nice massage right here in the office twice a week, you know what I mean?"

"You tell the cops about that?"

"You think it's a big deal to them? They're all on the pad—they know how it goes."

I turned to the young guy. "You like to look, Markie. Did she scream when you wanted to look too close?"

"It wasn't me! I didn't see her until—"

"It's okay, Markie. Until when?"

"Louie did it!" he shouted, pointing at the guy with the gold chains. "He showed me. He made me help him take her down to the basement—"

"You lying little punk!" Louie muttered, nodding at Manny. "He

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always wanted me outa here. Never wanted a partner." Then he turned to face me. "Yeah, okay. I took her downstairs. But *after* this freak finished with her. It wasn't me. The cops know. Manny pays them regular."

"He said she came here looking for a job," Markie said, indicating Louie. "I guess she needed some money and—"

The fat man smiled, watching my eyes under the mask. "Look, you're a professional, right? Somebody paid you to do a job. Okay, I understand. Business is business. Markie's a relative. A nephew, you know what that means? The kid's a peeper, but he never killed anyone. Louie's the one you want. You got paid for a body, do what you have to do. Everybody's happy."

"Markie don't look like a relative of yours," I told the fat man.

"You look real close, you can always see the family resemblance," he said, the smile leaving his face, knowing how it was going to end.

I tightened my finger on the trigger. Reached up and pulled the mask off my face.

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a *NEW* Jojo story by

JEFFRY SCOTT

The Charborough Festival is a great gas and Jojo Lorraine loved it there. Finding her old colleague Kitty Astell installed nearby at Charborough Hall had been a bonus . . .

JOJO AND MR. PUNCH

by JEFFRY SCOTT

"Say you will," Kitty Astell wheedled, little-girl style, "and I'll be your best friend forever, cross my heart."

Jojo pulled a face at herself in the mirror. She wasn't the sort of actress insecure or bloody-minded enough to demand star treatment, but Charborough arts-festival trimmings deserve grimaces. The dressing rooms—Jojo's, at least—had been fitted into what had been Victorian stables, giving her less room and far less comfort than the bygone horses.

"You are my best friend," she pointed out to Kitty, "one of many. But pestering and manipulation have been known to transfer people to my *ex*-friends list."

Kitty looked so crestfallen that Jojo sighed, "Don't be a twit, of course I'll come if it means that much."

Transformed and beaming, Kitty said airily, "It's not dinner as such—more your champagne cocktails and an outdoor buffet for neighbors and a few chums. Glorified barbecue, really. Dressyish but not drop-dead dressy."

A fat lot of help that was, Jojo thought. But it wasn't the fashion briefing that narrowed her eyes. Kitty was prattling a shade too artlessly. Irritatingly pretty (though only to rivals), Kitty had cartoon-enormous blue eyes, a charmingly tilted nose, and very little in the way of chin. It was a face created to signal, wholly deceptively, the candor of a child.

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"I just want a friend around on Sunday night," she continued to coax. "Lady of the manor sounds fine, but everyone knows I'm Barry's kept-woman of the manor and that's nowhere near the same. I feel so vulnerable at these parties—"

Jojo had seen Kitty in action before, charming her way past parking tickets, surly debt collectors, rightly suspicious wives. Hanging her head, glancing up through her eyelashes, Kitty faltered, "You needn't come if it's such a drag."

Jojo laughed so hard that she had to start painting her lips all over again. "Priceless! You *win,* Kitty—nothing will keep me away." She wanted to discover what the brat was up to, and there was only one way to find out.

"Brilliant." Momentarily, Kitty looked less like one of those tiresome child-women in a Dickens novel and more the streetwise urchin getting its own way. "The Hall's pretty when we put candles on the terrace. And you're bound to meet a few people you know." Terribly casual and throwaway, the last remark.

"From here? Festival people, you mean?"

"I doubt it." Barry Naston disapproved of the stage, and show business in general. "But people you know will turn up, they always do," Kitty said vaguely. "I must dash now, love. See you Sunday—half seven for eight, but any time will do."

Despite its prestige, the Charborough Festival doesn't take life too seriously. For a couple of weeks, once a year, this Sussex market town rigs a circus big-top on the turf of Castle Yard, and that's the theater. In that notable 1980 *Hamlet,* part of the tent's canvas was rolled up, allowing the audience to see the Ghost walk Charborough Castle's genuine battlements a few yards away.

It's a chummy, clubbable clutter of events, offering low comedy as well as high drama. Nightly recitals waft Vivaldi and the like on the summer air, but the music shares the odor of burgers and hotdogs cooked by local ladies running stalls in aid of St. John Ambulance or lost dogs.

The Charborough tradition is that players are approachable and cast and audience are expected to mingle. On closing night, there is a charity banquet at which guests are served by players still in makeup and costume from whatever play has just finished. Legend has it that Sir Alec, Sir Larry, and Sir John, pre-titles, did it in their time. There is also an unwritten law that in return for informality,

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fans leave daft questions at home, stare with discretion, and ask for rather than demand autographs.

Charborough is a great gas and Jojo loves it there. Finding Kitty Astell installed nearby at Charborough Hall had been a bonus. Jojo hadn't seen or heard of Kitty in some two years, but that was par for the course. Something of a Cheshire Cat, Kitty had a trick of melting away without explanation. This hadn't helped her career, but then it wasn't much of a career in the first place. Kitty was an immeasurably better actress offstage than on. It hardly mattered, everyone assuming that such a cute and sunnily unprincipled young woman would get married or something.

"It's been Or Something for the last year or so," Kitty explained when she located Jojo at the eve-of-festival reception. "With Barry Naston, your actual entrepreneur and international wheeler-dealer. He's obscenely affluent and very boring." Kitty wasn't into illusions, even self-serving ones. Further, she was no fool, as Jojo rediscovered when she dined a few days later with the master and mistress—apt word—of Charborough Hall.

Barry Naston was startlingly boring for a man safely distant from his fortieth birthday. Pallid, his lumpy-potato face escaping ugliness only because he was so nondescript within the Savile Row suit, Naston tried to radiate wisdom and solidity and succeeded in making cold porridge seem exciting. Jojo's fellow guests had been a grisly mix of businessmen Barry Naston was cultivating and local gentry patronizing them and their host for the sake of free food and wine.

Jojo didn't feel sorry for Kitty, but decided that luxury and security were being earned the hard way. Walking Jojo to her car after that solemn occasion, Kitty had confided, "The wedding's next month. I've fallen on my feet, eh? From superior bimbo to Mrs. Barry Naston Enterprises. Not bad for a slum kid what never learned nuffin'." Her tone contradicted the jaunty message. She might have been announcing an imminent term in prison with no remission on the horizon.

Jojo reminded herself of the Shylock syndrome. Cut the shallowest, most mercenary people and they'll bleed, emotionally speaking. The last time Jojo had been up to speed on Kitty's life, the girl was coming down from a bad love affair. And it had been love: Kitty had been radiant for a few months and, unprecedentedly, not only failed to brag about the suitor's credit-rating and virility but refused to divulge any details about him, not even his name.

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But something had gone wrong. Kitty Astell, so knowing in many ways, had been an innocent—unaware that love could hurt.

Hence the decision to opt for boring Barry, Jojo concluded as she drove away. There were worse fates, she supposed, but it was a shame. Then she caught herself wondering whether it would be a bigger shame for little Kitty or for the nerdy Barry Naston.

Part of Charborough Festival's chumminess is shown by its choice of plays. This year Jojo was in a vintage 1930s romp, *All Change.* Paying dutiful though resentful homage to their great dramatists, the British revere period froth, belly-laughs, and simpler double-entendres, seeing "classic farce" as no contradiction in terms.

All Change lives up to the title—childish, really, juvenile past doubt. Jojo, famous as prim Miss Debenham, didn't devise the notorious bath-towel business but did hone, tease, and buff (see how catching double-entendres can be?) it to the limit for *All Change*'s West End revival of a few years ago. When it emerged that she'd be *All Change*ing again—a two-weeks-only last-chance-to-see and all that—many a map was consulted in search of Charborough, and a number of buses were chartered for pilgrimages from remoter parts of Britain.

Silly but fun: Miss Debenham and Tottie Popham, another rippin' gel, lose their clothes. Never mind why, a rummage sale, an escaped lunatic, and the Fire Brigade come into it. Marooned in a gazebo, they see the vicar approaching. There is a voluminous bath towel—every gazebo should have one—and for a fast, furious, and painstakingly choreographed three minutes or more, the ladies struggle for its possession.

Enough of such frivolity. The point is that, what with Charborough's informality and the Dance of the Single Bath Sheet, Jojo kept meeting people. The snag is that while she rarely forgets a face and can memorize countless pages of script in an afternoon, names are different. Which led to the nagging, mildly embarrassing riddle over Mr. Punch.

Between the theater tent and the dressing rooms in the stables, players must trust to duckboards laid on the grass—essential because Castle Yard turns soggy after a light shower. Typical English summers leave it as marshland. One evening Jojo was negotiating the planks, cursing her spiked heels, when an old buffer materialized out of the twilight. She knew him from somewhere.

"Take my arm, Jojo," he invited, crooking his own, evidently de-

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lighted to squelch alongside in the mud. His grin put her in mind of childhood picture books and, crazily, a sandy beach and laughter long ago. The man's grin widened so that his beaky nose nearly touched his substantial chin when Jojo gratefully clutched his sleeve. Respectful, tentative yet somehow intimate, he challenged: "You don't remember me."

Quite right, damn it. "Nonsense," she told him. "Do I look the sort who lets total strangers pick her up?"

He chuckled. Nose and chin gave his profile a crescent-moon quality. That was it! Punchinello—Mr. Punch of seaside puppet shows. So that was what Jojo dubbed him, for lack of the real name.

They reached the end of the walkway. "Bless you, guv," said Jojo. She considered. Mrs. Punch might be awaiting him in the theater, resentful of alien lipstick on her spouse. To hell with it, he was elderly and borderline grotesque to boot, but his harmlessly cheeky Stage Door Johnny air charmed Jojo and she kissed his cheek.

Mr. Punch's button eyes squeezed shut as he beamed. "My lucky night! P'raps I can be of service again. You're a corker, my girl." And he bustled away.

They did meet again, a few days later at a lunchtime reception in Charborough. The borough council was presenting the festival's director with a silver salver to mark his decade at the helm. Charborough Corn Exchange, a little Georgian palace inside for all its homely title, was the venue. It was a handsome room, but it was packed and stuffy and Jojo's feet were killing her. A deferential, confiding sort of cough drew her attention, and there was Mr. Punch, who'd nudged and jostled enough space to set down a spindly gilded chair.

"I think," she whispered, "I want to marry you."

Mr. Punch crinkled delightedly. "You've got pretty ways, dear," he whispered back. "Always did have. Most unusual for a beauty."

Before she could reply, he started backing away, tapping his wristwatch. "Business to attend to," he mouthed. From his dark suit and the row of pens in his vest pocket, Jojo guessed that he owned a shop or might be a bookkeeper. What *was* his name, and where had she first heard it? Oblivious to the Mayor's speech, she fretted at the question. Angels came into it somehow. Gabriel? Peter? George? No bells rang. Other angels, then—theatrical backers? Maybe that was it. She'd been introduced to scores of angels in her time.

Afterward, Jojo made her way over to Jaqui, the festival PR lady.

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"Who's that lovely little man who looks like Punch? He was standing beside me just now."

But Jaqui, not having noticed, couldn't help. "Probably a patron. They were all invited to this. Local traders, farmers, and so forth can be patrons for ten quid a year. It gets their names on the program."

Toward the end of the festival, Jojo was entering her dressing room after a matinee when she was waylaid by—the cliche is unavoidable—a tall, dark, and handsome stranger. Except that he wasn't a stranger.

"Garrison *Flax,*" she crowed, going on tiptoes to kiss him, "what in the world are you doing here?" The pleasure was genuine—here was just about her favorite young American male.

They'd appeared in the same West End musical for six months. Garrison had been one of the Broadway cast, eager to make his mark in London. It had worried Jojo, because she could tell that Garrison Flax's gift was restricted to an amiable and engaging portrayal of an eternal character—himself. It wasn't ego, just a fact. Further, Garrison was a sprinter, not even a sound middle-distance man, making the marathons of major roles in the theater forbidden territory. She had told him as much, kindly, obliquely, flatteringly, urging him to go home to California and try films.

The next she knew was a postcard of the Hollywood sign and a bruised, bitter message that she'd been right—England was tired and stale, there was nothing for him there.

Jojo had felt that Garrison was right for the wrong reasons. His flight had nothing to do with her advice, she suspected. Wide experience of little boys of all ages hinted at Jojo that Garrison had been crossed in love and was sulking. Like any Edwardian romantic hero, he had Gone Away To Forget.

If so, the tantrum had been the making of him. Garrison won a supporting role in a TV cop show, was promoted to a spinoff project of his own, and the series was a cult these days.

Slipping an arm around his waist, Jojo teased, "You're supposed to be in Hollywood, a legend in your own lunchtime."

Garrison gave her a rueful look. "Hey, now I know I'm a star. Even though *Legal Guns* was pulled back in March and I've been wandering around Europe for months, my arrival here was hidden away on the front pages of most of your tabloids."

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"Ah, well, I only read the *Times*—and mainly the crossword, at that." She hugged him. "What brings you here, of all places?"

"A guy called Barry Naston."

Startled, Jojo asked, "He's a friend of yours?"

"Never set eyes on him," Garrison contradicted cheerfully. "I guess he's the number one fan of *Legal Guns*. One of those tabloids forwarded his letter. He's booked me into The Castle Arms hotel and invited me to some kind of party at his place tomorrow night. I'd have passed on all of it, but he explained about the festival and how you were burning up the scenery in *All Change*—which changed my mind. I didn't want to miss that."

She nodded abstractedly as they entered her dressing room. Deviousness, thy name is Kitty Astell. "So you'll be going to Boring Barry's shindig?"

He shrugged. "Guess I'd better, seeing he's bankrolling my hotel room. Sunday in the country, I remember about that stuff. What else is there to do, anyway?"

Removing her makeup, she gave Garrison covert study in the mirror. He was good-looking as ever—not happy-looking, however. Cancel sulks, substitute heartbreak, she told herself.

Aloud, she said brightly, "Is there a Mrs. Garrison Flax now—or *what's* the West Coast jargon?"

"Significant other. Nah, who needs it? The more I see of Hollywood, the better celibacy looks. You meet a better class of people."

Jojo wanted to assure him that his heart was new enough to mend itself, but he wouldn't have believed her. So she talked of everything and anything. Nearly. She didn't mention that she was invited to Barry Naston's party the following night. She was certain that somebody had expected her to mention it, a natural remark when Garrison Flax popped up.

Smiling grimly, Jojo had a vision of a marionette with a face much like her own. Exactly like, actually. And there was something about having her strings pulled that excited her most stubborn streak.

Jojo had rented a flat above a teashop in Charborough High Street. At seven-thirty on Sunday evening, she was unlocking her MG two-seater, parked outside, when she spotted Mr. Punch.

He'd emerged from the porch of the building opposite, a gentlemen's outfitters, blinds drawn on this non-working day. He fussed with the doorlock for a moment and it struck her that he ought to have been an actor. Even from across the street, his emotions were

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simple to gather—he looked flustered and as near angry as such a genial old person could manage. Suddenly Mr. Punch had a dash of the White Rabbit from *Alice in Wonderland.*

"Problems?" she called.

He trotted over to her. He was wearing a dinner jacket and his patent-leather pumps gleamed, as did his thinning grey hair, brushed so thoroughly that his scalp showed pink. "Hello, Jojo! You look ravishing. I'd love to stop and chat, but I'm late." She stifled a giggle at the White Rabbit dialogue.

And then Mr. Punch snapped his fingers. "I bet you're off to Mr. Naston's affair at the Hall."

"Bullseye. Select any prize item from the top shelf, sir."

Mr. Punch cackled politely. "Me, too—but my beastly car conked out, and Charborough on a Sunday? I've been on the phone up in my flat for half an hour and the taxi firm won't even deign to answer." He gave the little car a comically dubious look. "Would it be an awful cheek if I begged a lift with you?"

"My pleasure," Jojo told him.

She was slightly startled, at the end of the three-mile journey, to find the gates of the Hall shut and a uniformed security man, walkie-talkie in hand, asking their names. After a cracklingly one-sided conversation with his radio, the guard opened the gates.

"Checkpoint Charlie," Jojo observed acidly. There were many cars parked both sides of the drive. So much for Kitty Astell's promise of a glorified barbecue.

"Only sensible." Mr. Punch was sitting with his knees near his chin, a large though not tall man only just fitting the MG's passenger space. "Lots of people milling about, and he may have valuables on the premises, even if he doesn't own the house."

"He doesn't?" Jojo started finessing the MG into a slot between a Rolls and a stretched Merc. "But I thought—"

"He was the squire. Mr. Naston likes to give that impression." Mr. Punch hopped out, straightening with a groan, and made a gallant fuss over opening the door for her.

Charborough Hall looked uneasy, floodlit, as though aware of vulgarity. Barry Naston, looking very similar to a dance-hall manager in his white tux, stood at one side of the pillared porch and Kitty at the other, greeting guests and moving them inside after momentary chatter. Sighting the newcomers, Kitty made sure that

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Naston dealt with them, turning away on the pretext of adjusting her necklace.

Barry gave Jojo a cool nod and frowned at Mr. Punch. "I thought you were bringing that TV fellow," he grumbled rudely.

Too mortifying, she thought. The oaf was silently demanding to know her companion's identity and now she'd have to confess ignorance, humiliating herself and hurting Mr. Punch's feelings. But the old rascal winked at her—she realized that he'd known she'd been bluffing all along—before pumping Naston's hand. "Oliver Pickerell—very civil of you to invite us."

Naston did a classic double-take, swallowed audibly, and gabbled, "Not at all. I mean, honored you came and, er—"

"Quite so," Mr. Punch said drily and, two fingers under Jojo's smooth elbow, he swept past their incoherent host.

"What was that all about?" she whispered. While a corner of her mind argued that Pickerell had nothing to do with angels, so what muddle had she made over her escort?

Quietly amused, Mr. Punch rolled his eyes. "He thinks I can buy him out of petty cash. That always makes an impression, my dear." Now they were partway along the broad corridor which ran in fumed-oak grandeur from the Hall's front door to french windows at the rear, giving access to the terrace. Mr. Punch halted, indicating another door where a uniformed maid waited.

"There's where you go to make yourself more beautiful. I hope to see you later, Jojo. Thanks for the lift."

When she left the cloakroom minutes afterward, Jojo was in time to see Garrison Flax's wide shoulders and curly head framed in the front door with Kitty Astell—her back to Jojo—talking fast. And then Barry, who had been hovering in the corridor, pounced on Jojo.

It wasn't what he said, initially, that jarred. It was his manner—half smirking, half admiring. "Why didn't you tell me that you and old Pickerell—" The smirk turned smirkier. "Fancy you luring that old recluse out of his lair!" Unwilling to admit ignorance, she smiled meaninglessly. Barry stepped closer, sweaty with excitement. "Listen, get me five minutes alone with him a bit later and I'll make it well worth your while."

The impudence of it left her speechless. She was so furious that she might have hit him. To be treated like a barmaid or worse and promised a nice tip! But Naston saved himself unknowingly when he glanced toward the front door and discovered that Kitty had

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decamped, leaving a fresh batch of guests hovering on the porch. With a tongue-click of irritation, he excused himself.

Kitty had a lot to pay for, Jojo fumed, marching in the opposite direction toward the terrace. A professional aware of being on show, she looked unruffled on getting there, for all her temper. And the scene was calculated to cool her down, for Kitty had been right, it was pleasant out there. The terrace ran the full width of the house, a flagstoned expanse islanded with stone urns and blur-featured statues. Beyond a low limestone balustrade stretched the park, detail melting away as twilight became night.

At least sixty guests were grouped around circular tables, each table bearing candles in polished glass shades, or congregated by the buffet, still empty of food but showing a promising array of plates and silverware brooded over by a haughty swan sculpted out of ice.

Scanning the guests, Jojo distinguished men and women from the County set—defiantly shabby or dowdy, though the women would prefer to term it understated—and men in vulgarly smart suits, their partners' dresses revealing much skin. A mix of gentry and the predatory end of the business spectrum, just as at Barry's dinner party.

Then she dismissed social studies. Garrison Flax was descending the shallow stone steps from the terrace and his purposeful, staring-ahead manner persuaded her that he was following, not strolling at random. Slipping out of her shoes and dangling them from one finger, Jojo padded after him.

Cigarette fireflies dancing in the gathering darkness hinted that several couples were exploring. She lost sight of Garrison within a minute, but, knowing Kitty, she made for the summerhouse, built to imitate a Greek temple. Garrison's laugh and Kitty's crystal tinkle, heard from within the folly, proved her right.

"Come out, you're surrounded," Jojo called. Kitty's stricken gasp made the walk worthwhile. Two heads popped around the temple's doorway, giving it the look of a hugely ornate cuckoo clock.

"Oh, it's you." Relieved, though sheepish, Kitty came out, towing Garrison, who was holding her hand. Hardening herself against the youngsters' glow of happiness, Jojo said flatly, "Nice work, Kitty. You told Barry Naston *I* wanted to bring Garrison tonight. Otherwise he'd have wanted to know what was going on. Good question."

Twisting around to look up at him, Kitty said, "Garry never knew about it—he came in good faith, don't blame him."

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"It never occurred to me to blame Garrison. You can handle scheming bitchery all on your own, Kitty."

Garrison began hotly, "Now hold on—" but Kitty put her fingers across his lips.

"All right, I used you," she told Jojo. "But Garry's the only person I've ever loved. We broke up and he went back to America, and I was so miserable nothing seemed to matter. Then the papers were full of him being in England—and it was like coming alive again. I had to see him. But what could I do? If I phoned him, or wrote—well, you can't explain things properly that way. We needed to be face to face. So I forged a letter from Barry asking Garry down. And I used you for cover, in case Barry cut up rough." Kitty's eyes widened. "I took it as given you'd want to help me secure one last chance of happiness."

Jojo thought the catch in Kitty's voice was masterly. The frustrating part was that the wretched girl was both affected, playing her role predictably, and sincere. She was radiant, and Garrison seemed ready to float away like a human balloon filled with euphoria instead of helium.

Looking stern, Jojo lectured, "You have to tell Barry, Kitty. I mean now—tonight. You owe him that." But she was no good at sermons, for she couldn't help adding thoughtfully, "There ought to be a word for out-of-wedlock infidelity."

Garrison Flax spoke curtly. "It doesn't arise. She's out of here tonight, with me."

Kitty nodded confirmation. "Of course I'll tell Barry, as soon as this ghastly party's over and the freeloaders have cleared off. I'm leaving tonight in what I stand up in, is that fair enough? Don't preach at me, Jojo."

"Sorry, darling," Jojo said. "But I *was* a super Joan of Arc at drama school."

There were many more people on the terrace and a string trio was playing when Jojo returned there—seeking Mr. Punch. She caught up with him in a shadowy corner, brushing dust from his knees. "Turned my ankle on an uneven flagstone and took a tumble," he panted. " 'Oh, what a fall was there, my friends.' " He did look slightly shaken.

Leading him to a marble bench, Jojo whisked a glass of champagne from a passing waiter's tray and gave it to the casualty. Morale improving, Mr. Punch raised it to her. "Prime! Moonlight, music,

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a glass of bubbly, and me. Tete-a-tete with a beauty. Cheers, my dear."

When she stayed silent, his face fell. "You're not offended, I hope?"

She patted his arm. "I'm sorry, it was a sweet compliment, darling. I was just wondering—" but the saga of Kitty and Garrison Flax was too complex to explain, and private besides, so she changed the end of the sentence "—why Barry Naston's throwing this party. It's more than just having a few neighbors around for drinks, wouldn't you say?"

"I daresay," Mr. Punch predicted with the smugness of a know-it-all, "he means to brag about the Tsar's rubies."

Jojo looked blank.

"Surely you've heard of them? I thought everyone had. Strictly speaking, they belonged to a Grand Duchess, but Tsar's rubies has more of a ring to it." Mr. Punch laughed and wagged his head sardonically. "Smuggled out of Russia after the Revolution, sold in nineteen twenty-two to finance an anti-Bolshevik crusade, rarely seen or heard of since then—pretty well vanished until last month. A necklace and bracelet—ugly if you want my opinion—but a history to them. They turned up in Switzerland—where else?—sold to an unknown buyer. Recently the City's been full of tales that our Mr. Naston bought them for the best part of two million sterling."

"Oh, no," Jojo breathed. Naston planned a night of triumph and Kitty was about to kick him into touch. A connoisseur's example of bad timing.

Mr. Punch, mistaking her meaning, said, "I bet I'm right, young lady. Why else would he have the place guarded—and ask Fleet Street gossip columnists here, eh?"

"This is *awful*." Jojo rose, staring around. "Where's that confounded girl? She can't let Barry make a fool of himself and—"

Too late. The trio played an extra loud, arresting set of chords in a fanfare for strings. Standing on the balustrade, arms spread, Barry roared, "Ladies and gentlemen—!"

The raised voice made Kitty Astell pause. Jojo had just caught sight of her pushing through the throng to speak to Barry. For the moment, though, it was impossible.

"Most of you know I'm getting married soon!" Barry trumpeted. "Tradition forbids me to see Kitty's wedding dress, but there's no such ban on me giving her a sneak preview of a rather special gift in store!" He gestured over the crowd and a grey-haired, definably

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disapproving sort of man stepped forward and handed up a steel box about the shape and size of a telephone book.

"That's torn it—the butler," Mr. Punch muttered cryptically to Jojo.

"He looks more like a policeman to me," she commented.

"Not *a* butler, my dear, Butler's his name. Ex-Detective Inspector Sam Butler of the Yard. Referred to by some of us as The Butler. He runs a security company these days." Mr. Punch pressed a silk handkerchief to his jaw. "Neuralgia. The night air generally gives me gyp," he explained.

Poor soul, he *was* in the wars tonight. Jojo made a soothing but abstracted sound, staring at Barry Naston, who had unlocked the box and now flipped the lid open. And, stunned by what he saw inside, staggered and nearly lost his balance.

Ex-Inspector Butler, watching intently, grabbed his arm and helped him down to the terrace. "Not to worry, ladies and gentlemen," Butler announced. "Mr. Naston's had a dizzy spell, that's all. Please carry on as before and he'll be back with you shortly."

A waiter helped Barry back into the house. Butler took his place on the balustrade, giving the area poker-faced, deliberate study. Then he leaped down and walked straight over to Jojo and Mr. Punch on their secluded bench. Standing over them, he said, "Put the hankie away, Sid, it's pathetic. I'd know that face anywhere, chum."

They were in Naston's study—Jojo, Mr. Punch, Barry, Kitty, the erstwhile Inspector Butler, and two of his employees, one at the door and the other blocking the window.

Mr. Punch had just said, "Leave it out, Mr. Butler, I never took his blessed sparklers."

Barry, still dazed, looked like an overgrown infant coming to terms with the fact that there is no Santa Claus. Addressing Butler, he pleaded, "This isn't Oliver Pickerell the financier?"

"Not quite." The expert was sardonic. "Pickerell's never set foot out of his house in Mayfair since the Fifties, to my knowledge. No, this chap is Sid Cuffin and he's a burglar, makes a habit of it. Old sparring partners, eh, Sid?"

Mr. Punch folded his arms. "That doesn't mean I took his blasted rubies."

Kitty, tone thin, said to nobody in particular, "We can't get married now, not with all this going on."

Naston waved that aside with a silent snarl. Eyes on Butler but

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stabbing a finger at Jojo, he said, "The Lorraine woman vouched for him, conned him past me. She must be in on it."

Before Jojo could erupt, Mr. Punch jumped up. "That's daft, Mr. Butler. Miss Lorraine met me years ago and was too much of a lady to let on that she'd forgotten who I was. She gave me a lift here, that's all. Dumbo—" he jerked his chin at Barry "—fell over himself to ask me in when I happened to mention Mr. Pickerell's name."

Butler shoved him back into the chair. "Don't get lippy, Sid—mind your manners and you might do yourself a bit of good. Give the stuff back right now. Mr. Naston's not a vindictive man, get my drift?"

The ex-policeman was talking, coaxing as much for his client's benefit as for the burglar's, Jojo could tell. Barry's mouth opened and he made a rebellious movement before catching on and nodding reluctant agreement.

DETECTIVERSE

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by THOMAS E. WEIL, JR.

A man from Bangkok known as "Thai"
Sold neckwear on the side.
He claimed the goods were colorfast—
It turned out that he lied.
The buyer asked for money back,
But a refund was denied,
The seller was found strangled—
By a tie-dyed tie Thai died.

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WILLIAMS FORREST

"We're gathered here," Mark said, leaning his arm along the mantel, the smoke rising from his cigarette, "to celebrate the fact that we're young and alive—and, I might add, that nobody else is home."

Williams Forrest has published fiction and non-fiction in such diverse publications as The Saturday Evening Post, Redbook, McCall's, *the* Ladies Home Journal, Good Housekeeping, The Writer, Coronet, Liberty, McLeans, *the* Toronto Star, *and* Chatelaine. *"The Game" was originally titled "Lamb to the Slaughter" (not to be confused with the Roald Dahl story) and appeared in slightly different form in the November 1962 issue of* Cavalier Magazine. *Mr. Forrest lives in Massachusetts with his wife Elaine, also a prolific writer . . .*

THE GAME

by WILLIAMS FORREST

When Maxine first extended the invitation to Bob and told him his girl was invited, he asked, "Why? Here we've broken up, and you're inviting me and my girl to a house party. I don't get it."

"Don't be gauche, darling," she said, purring. "I'm not Lucrezia Borgia. I happen to like you and I happen to want you and Nora to get out of this hell-hole of a city, just like I want to, and have fun with some beautiful kids down at Aunt Rose's place on the North Shore. The parties there are wonderful, and you don't have to worry about money—we don't race around to bistros, it's all home stuff. We'll probably have a party at Mark Wilson's house."

He was puzzled, but tempted. She was a little sorry for him, his

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innocent cupidity. She wondered whether some of the attraction he had for her was because he was a poor, city-college student, proud and yet eager to know other things. She remembered with nostalgia the concerts they'd attended, his intensity, the soirees in the Village, drinking beer, his embarrassment once—no, twice—when she had to help out from her pocketbook. She had been glad she'd met him at one of those literary things, but then he had bluntly passed her up for a little know-nothing creature who had some kind of nervous tic about pulling her skirt down at remorseless intervals whenever she was sitting in a chair.

If Maxine had been able to respect the girl, no matter that she was an envelope-addresser or some fantastically drone thing like that, she wouldn't have felt the need of dark, willful fury. She would have waved her hand gallantly as she was pretending to do. But, after all!

The whole invitation situation was solidified when Maxine inveigled Aunt Rose into phoning the waxen little idol at her job and inviting her in person, with that inviolate, sweet authority that was Aunt Rose's forte. "I've never been to a house party," the little Dresden doll had breathed, and it was fait accompli.

Maxine, Bob, and Nora took the train out to the island and were met by Aunt Rose's chauffeur with the station wagon. Large slow flakes of snow were falling. The others were at the house when they arrived and came out and greeted them. Aunt Rose was splendid in a hostess gown, and Roy, the West Indian, served cocktails. There was a good buffet, and then everyone went off to their rooms to get ready for Mark's party.

When they rolled into Mark's drive, the house was fully lighted. You could smell the salt water, although you couldn't see it. The air was crisp. There were fragile, wet tissues of snow on everybody's cheeks. Nora was overtly excited. Bob was more restrained. The wide front door was open and Mark was effusively ready to greet them, his vest black, with gold buttons.

There were about twenty people there, and Mark was very good as lord of the manor. It was a sprawling house and reminiscent of the good times in the Twenties, but the gingerbread was gone and Swedish originals were the furnishings. Bright light came from fireplaces in the library, the lounge, and in the great hallway.

Mark always chose the lounge as the place for his major meetings, for his placement of himself, for the Game. He liked to have his

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jacket open, a thumb in a pocket of his vest, and a cigarette wanding past his eyes. This time he didn't deviate from formula. It was a low mantel, and he stood by it, brushing against the screen, moving away when the slow-burning logs grew too hot. On one side of him were fire tools, finely burnished—a spade, a pair of tongs, a brilliant poker.

"We're gathered here," he said, leaning his arm along the mantel, the smoke rising from his cigarette, "to celebrate the fact that we're young and alive—and, I might add, that nobody else is home."

Delighted cheers, softly.

"And, I might add, if add again I must, and I will, we have new friends."

Soft, affectionate cheers.

"We must be nice to them."

In the next half hour, Maxine watched the buildup. The kids who were in the know were extraordinary to Nora and Bob, and it seemed, all in all, like a show in which magicians were trying to divert attention. Mark watched and at last called the halt. "Hey, hey," he said, "let's, for the hell of it, play the Game!"

Cheers and clapping.

"Gather round," he said.

He looked among them. "Nora," he said, "you have the honor. You're the newest girl, and girls are more intelligent than guys." He bowed at Bob, and there were gentle deprecatory laughs. When Nora protested, he exclaimed, "You don't have to know how to play, all you have to do is be bright, and I've discovered that already for myself. Bob, take her out to the library. Theba, show them there and make them comfortable. Nora's up first. Okay, Nora?"

"Well, I guess so."

They left the room and Mark languished against the mantel.

"As all but a very few of you know," he said, "this is a word game, so to speak. There are words involved—naughty words, if we can help it."

Laughter.

"What we do is explain to the 'client' that she must try to redescribe a story we have invented. She must ask questions, of anyone in the room, which will receive only yes-or-no answers. In that way, the story develops—and we hope develops well." Laughter. "The story, of course, is the patient's—ah, client's—own, not ours." Laughter. "We don't develop a damn thing, she does." Laughter.

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"We don't," he said, "give a yes answer if she happens to ask if the story is about a carpenter—we might wind up with her ideas about Jesus Christ and that isn't at all what we want. I think we all agree," he continued, bowing a little at them to credit them with his prescience, too, "we all agree that there're two of each of us, the nicey-nicey layer, and—" he smiled broadly "—the abyss." A few of them laughed appreciatively.

"Each of us, to simplify, is a Jekyll and Hyde, and, not to make a pun, we want her Hyde."

General laughter.

"No," he said, shaking his head, "we don't want the nicey-nicey, so we give a no answer to any question that seems to lead in that dangerous direction—a direction, I might add, that is ruinous to our little hunt." He paused and drew elegantly at his cigarette. "Now, to make sure things are clear: an example, an elementary one. Say she mentions sex, does that get a yes or a no?"

They gave a chorus of yeses. He regarded them as if they were bright children, nodding, and quickly said, "Doctor." Some of them flashed no in unison. He smiled. "Of course. Because a yes to that might lead us into a benevolent anecdote about her trials with chicken pox." They laughed. "We could," he added, "get abortion, of course, but I doubt it."

Mark stood reflectively for a moment, the tip of his index finger touching the edge of his lower lip, the cigarette standing up stiffly and wafting smoke past his unblinking eyes. Then he saw Theba looking into the room from the doorway. He nodded. "Bring her in," he said.

When Nora came into the room, looking a little frightened, Mark reassuringly took both her hands in his and led her to the chair to the left of the fireplace. Everyone could see that her knees were trembling.

She felt better when she sat down. She pulled down her skirt and looked at Bob. He nodded encouragingly at her.

Mark stood indolently by the fireplace. He said, to Nora, "We're all among friends here, and cocktail parties tend to get a bit risque. Don't let it bother you. We've developed a rather gruesome story, but don't condemn us because of it—we're naughty characters." He shrugged disarmingly.

"Almost everybody here's been through this, so don't worry. All you have to do is ask questions and you'll get a yes or a no. Ask

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anyone—don't concentrate on any one person, we all know the story. When you get your yes or no, you can go on from there. Do you understand?"

She said very carefully, "As I understand it, you have a story, but I can only ask questions that will get yes-or-no answers, and I have to go on from there?"

"Good girl, good girl! But Bob here is disqualified—he doesn't know the story. And Theba is disqualified, too. Ready?"

Nora giggled and put two palms against her nervous cheeks. "Well, I would bet it's about sex."

"Bravo!" said Mark.

Others clapped. Nora said, feeling more assured, "What else? Well, now." She put her palms on her knees and considered, tugging down her skirt with slim fingers that Mark watched.

"A man and a woman," she said. There was a bit of hesitation in the room, but Mitzi solved it, perhaps with her intuition that you might not get deep with Nora if the answer was no. "Yes!" she said.

Mark was relaxing. "Just point your finger," he said. "Ask anyone, and then point your finger."

Maxine looked at Bob, who was smiling encouragingly at Nora. Maxine felt a deep waiting within herself—so deep, so soft, that she was afraid of it. It didn't feel like her at all.

"It's about sex and a man and a woman. Is it a tragedy?" She pointed.

"No," was the reply. Mark nodded, pleased. A yes might have gotten them Romeo and Juliet.

Nora put her long fingertips to her forehead. Everyone held their breath while she thought. "Of course," she said. "It isn't a tragedy because the girl liked it, whatever gruesome thing it was."

"Oh, point at somebody," said Mark impatiently. She pointed at him, and he snapped, "Yes."

Nora thought, stumbled. "I don't really think I can guess."

There were murmurs of protest. "No," she said, "I don't think I can. I mean it's between a man and a woman and it's about sex and it's gruesome, but it isn't gruesome to them. Are they—well, could they be insane?"

"They're not insane," said Mitzi.

Nora shrugged and looked lost. "But they have to be."

"No," said Mark. He and Mitzi looked warmly but worriedly at each other. It could stop here unless the girl was inspired. Would she be?

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Nora frowned, drew her brows, and was blank. The fire leapt and sang and made dancing patterns. Mark was ferocious. He knew he had to break the proper borders of the game. He had to take this creature over the hurdle, and it was obvious that she had one.

He put up a finger so no one would protest. His voice was kind, as if it was only something that was trying to help Nora pull through this barrier with finesse and congratulation. Bob was looking at Nora worriedly, Maxine saw—a proud, anxious proprietor who wanted her to do well in front of these aliens.

Softly Mark said, "There can be unusual circumstances, Nora. Circumstances where people are not insane, but what is gruesome becomes normal."

There was a wait. Nora tugged down her skirt, her face flushed, as she thought. "Like war?" she said. She did not point, and Mitzi said, "Yes!"

"Like war?" said Nora. "War. Everything is different in war, isn't it?"

Yes.

"I'm getting close?"

Yes.

"War," said Nora. She was looking off into space, thinking, her pink-and-white complexion heightened. "War. I don't really know, but I've read enough. People, well, people sell things, even their daughters, for cigarettes?" Yes.

"People aren't insane, there are things they have to do, to eat." Yes.

"Well, if this is a gruesome story, to us anyway, and it's about a man and a woman, then she gave herself to the man for food. She didn't want to, but she had to." Yes.

"She fell in love with him?"

Mark and Mitzi almost answered in unison, "No!" No novel here by Erich Maria Remarque.

Nora made a strange grimace. "She didn't fall in love with him. She was ashamed because she—did it—did it to have food."

"No," said Mitzi.

"No?" said Nora. "She didn't fall in love with him, and it wasn't a tragedy. He didn't get killed, I suppose. And yet it's gruesome—but not to her?" She sat silent for a while.

There was audible breathing in the room. The fire performed its ballet. "Well, it would be gruesome to her if she had to do it again. That would be gruesome."

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No.

"No?" said Nora. "Well, then she did it again, and to her it wasn't gruesome?" Yes.

"It was only for the food, she had to?" No.

"It wasn't for the food—she wanted the food, but it wasn't for that only, and there was more than one man?" Yes.

"You do things in a war that you might not want to do or can't do—you don't have the opportunity. But when nothing matters, you do it?" Yes.

"It was a war, and there were soldiers." Yes.

"There was a war," said Nora, "and there were soldiers. The soldiers came into the town." Yes.

Nora looked into distance. "I think I'm getting it. There were soldiers, and she did it with them, at first for food." Yes.

"A lot of them." Yes.

"They gave her food." Yes.

"Was she a virgin?" Yes.

"It wasn't because they fed her that it wasn't gruesome?" No.

She stared away from them. Her voice seemed to come from a distance. "I see, I see—I think I can see it very well now," she said in a quiet faroff voice. "Yes, now I know. There were all these men, hundreds and hundreds, and they came marching in and driving in trucks, and she was the only girl there, and she knew—she really did know what they all wanted, and she began to like it." Yes.

Maxine looked at Bob. He was listening. There was a fascinated listening around his forehead, his eyes, and the edges of his mouth. Maxine felt her own listening, taut, like a stretched chain.

"She waited for them, the new ones, always new ones." Yes.

"Is that all?"

"No!" cried Mitzi.

"That isn't all? Then, of course—" Nora's voice was sure and rushing now "—she wanted to make a *spectacle* of herself. She had all these men, but it wasn't enough, she wanted all of them!"

Yes.

Nora's eyes shone. "All at once!"

Yes.

"She wanted all of them to be watching."

Yes.

"So she let them."

Yes.

"She was happy."

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Yes.

Nora was looking into space with moist lips. Mark stood erect and said tenderly, "That's it, that's the story. Yes, you got it very well—not completely exact, of course, but in the main, that's it."

Most of the others in the room clapped. Nora smiled, a triumphant smile.

"I want to apologize for the story," said Mark. "We developed quite a rugged plot—I daresay we let ourselves go a bit. I think we owe Nora an apology."

He looked at her sternly, as if he expected her to expect one. She looked at her hands. Folded them.

Mark said, "For God's sake, isn't there a gentleman in the house? A drink for Nora."

Someone got her a drink. She sipped it gratefully, but delicately. Her curved lip was pink on the edge of the glass. She looked like Alice in Wonderland—her long hair, her neat knees, her high heels, even, because they didn't seem to belong. They were toed in, as if protecting something.

After the drink, someone gave her a cigarette. She smoked quite well, as if she had watched it in the mirror. She looked around and said, "I'm not angry—please don't think I am. I understood you were going to make a gruesome story. I accepted the game, and I'm not angry. I want you to believe that."

"Just for the hell of it," said Mark, "can I ask you a rather odd question?"

Nora smiled. "Of course." Her native shyness had broken down under the attention, drinks, and her seeming success among so many people.

"All right. Now this is an important question. You know that about twenty of us invented this story, all throwing in things," said Mark. "All of us spontaneously throwing in our tidbits—our little sections—then putting it all together."

Nora was looking at him quizzically. He made a vague motion, so that the others in the room didn't watch too closely, or pretended they didn't. They made a milieu of polite sound, as if they were interested but not too much.

Mitzi spoke out, as if exasperated. "What he wants to know is, what kind of person—not twenty people, but a single person—would think up a story like that for himself!" She intentionally used the masculine.

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Nora looked confused. Mark made eyes toward the ceiling, denying Mitzi. Then he said, "Vaguely, she's right, vaguely. Tell us all, tell us, if one person, just one person thinking about it, invented that story, what kind of a person would it be?"

"Why, I don't really know," said Nora.

Mark thrust, "I bet you have an idea."

She nodded. "Yes, I suppose I do."

Maxine looked around the room at the same time as she looked at herself. Her eyes slid on Bob as mercury would slide over any surface. She cared for him no longer, and it was easy for her to tell why. He was inert. He wasn't yelling, fighting, beating people. But he should be—he should be getting himself and his lamb out of here. But he was sitting there with an absurd pride, an inchoate faith. Maxine stared at him, her heart beating. She heard the anticipation in the room as if it was the rustling sound of panicked mice. She saw the faces of girls rimmed with pretty, ready disdain, as if one of their competitors was going to fall in a slimy puddle.

"What would you think?" said Mark. "What would you think of a person who, all by herself, would think up this story we invented for you?"

Nora took a sip of her drink. All eyes were on her. She looked for a place to put the glass down and didn't find it, so someone came and took it and put it on the floor. "Well," she said, "I mean, if a person did think that way, I'd say she was sick."

"Definitely in need of treatment?" asked Mark innocently.

Nora looked at him brightly. "Well, do you think so?"

"Well," he said, mocking her with the repetition of the word, "I think I might agree with you, but I don't know."

Nora by this time seemed to have the idea that she was safe, alert, and doing nicely. Certainly she had had the respectful attention of everyone all evening so far. Even her motions had a preciseness of sureness, even the nod of her head. "I don't think you can be unsure," she said. "Do you, really?"

Mark looked around the room. "Mitzi?"

"She's right," said Mitzi, "she's right again."

"Okay," said Mark, "okay," as if in some kind of defeat. "Okay then, let's have another drink."

He remained by his post at the mantel, turning his glass to reflect the light.

"What if I should tell you, Nora, that everything you said, every invention you made, came whole cloth from your own mind?"

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Nora was bewildered, her cheeks abruptly indented. Bob almost stood up, but sat back, looking first at Maxine and then at Mark. Nora said, "Why, all of you invented it. When I was out of the room, you invented it." She looked around. She was confused and her knitted fingers trembled against each other. The climate of the room had altered severely, without warning, and she had no point of reference for it. Her toes moved in her shoes as if she wanted to run.

Mark shook his head. "No, darling," he said, caressing the victim, "pay attention—pay attention to teacher. I want to tell you about the Game."

Maxine looked at Bob. He stared around the room at the others. He looked at Mark and then he looked at Nora. His eyes stayed on her, as did the eyes of the others.

"Now," said Mark. He drank, put his glass on the mantel, and stood at limp, strong ease. "The Game is simple. When we ask you to leave the room, we don't really invent a story, we merely discuss the system of giving you yes-or-no answers to any questions your darling little mind wishes to conjure up. The system is simple—we lead you not into the paths of righteousness. We lead you into your personal dungeons. If you start talking clean, we cut you off with a no. We encourage you whenever you get dirty. We lead you down the paths of your own dirtiness, whatever it might be. And your story was your own—every word, every image, every symbol, every instinct, every wish, every revelation. None of us thought of a line of it. We just helped you stay on your route, that fearful route you would have tried to escape by if it had been left only up to you."

"You're lying," said Nora. "It's a trick, you're teasing me."

"Oh, God, how sweet," said Mitzi. Nora didn't seem to hear. Her eyes were fixed on Mark.

"I'm afraid it's no trick," he said. "It's the Game. What you said was your own—yours, yours, yours."

Her face was changing, but something was fighting the change. She still looked sweet and gentle. Firmly, reasonably, she said, "I couldn't have thought up a story like that, I couldn't have. I only did it—" she hesitated, staring toward Bob "—I only did it because—because I was brought here, and, well, because it seemed to be expected of me. I didn't want to tell that story, I even didn't say words that I knew must be in it. I just did it because I was brought here."

"If all twenty people here tell you that what I say is true, will you believe it?"

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"I couldn't believe it," she whispered. "I couldn't believe it, I never could."

"Don't you know you're an exhibitionist, and that's why, as we've all observed, you're always pulling down your skirt—because you'd really like to be doing it the other way?"

She sat there seemingly reasonable, seemingly gentle, and seemingly implacable, her feet and knees together, her hands in her lap, her back straight, her face enigmatic and positive, as if she were waiting on a platform for a late train and some disgusting men were nearby saying things she didn't want to hear, and she would pretend she did not.

There was complete silence. None of them had ever seen anything like this. Usually the victim became belligerent or left or laughed or argued or got drunk. The silence was so deep that watches ticked.

Mark said, "Mitzi?"

"I'm here."

"Did we invent a story?"

"No."

"Theba. Theba, you took them out, and then we disqualified you because you didn't know the story. Tell us, Theba, was it a proper disqualification?"

Theba lifted her shoulders. "I knew there wasn't going to be a story—I mean from you."

Mark lifted his hand. "Maxine?"

Maxine was silent. Mark turned away from her, asked others. The consensus was that Nora had invented the story herself.

"Now," said Mark. "Now, Nora, don't you believe? If you don't believe us, at least believe yourself, because you do know, deep inside, don't you?"

Nora was looking into a shining facet of the room somewhere and did not respond.

Mark waved the butt of his cigarette, pulled out the fire screen, and dropped it inside. "The girl wins," he said, "she wins." He walked over to Nora with a great air of congratulation, saying, "You win, baby, you beat us all," and touched her shoulder.

He pulled back his hand fast.

She had not moved or looked at him or seemed to hear. Her eyes were wide and serene, her hands were in her lap, her feet and knees together, and she stared into space as if she were waiting for an overdue train in a cold station where she was alone.

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A special new-decade toast from a contributor whose byline we've treasured for exactly three decades . . .

BYLINES

by JAMES HOLDING

Come, mystery lovers, one and all,
Let's pause a moment and recall
How much of pleasure and delight
Is given us by those who write.
Let's shower praise and benediction
On those who write our favorite fiction.
They puzzle, scare, and sometimes pain us
But never fail to entertain us,
For these are very special folk—
John Mortimer and Ed D. Hoch,
Ruth Rendell and Patricia Moyes,
Andrew Vachss and B. DuBois.
You hate to turn the night light off?
Thank Gilbert, Powell, or Asimov.
You like to stay awake a lot?
Try Donald Olson, Jeffry Scott.
For criminal, exciting acts,
Read Savage, Suter, Highsmith, Baxt.
And who would wish, though time is fleeting,
To pass up anything by Keating
Or one of Joe Gores' fictive foes
Or de la Torre's poetic prose?
Who can forget John Dickson Carr
Or miss a story by Hank Slesar,
Or fail to greet with loud "all hails"
Clark Howard's tense ex-convict tales?
All their readers would count it loss
To miss a Lovesey, Bankier, or Cross—
Or a Barnard, Twohy, or Nedra Tyre,
A Symons, Stuart, or a new Ann Bayer.

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Come, fans, and sadly join us when
We sing the praises of *these* men:
Macdonald (Ross), MacDonald (John),
Both of whom, alas, are gone,
Along with Ritchie (Jack)—a man
Whom no one could write better than.
And Pentecost, who through the years
First raised them up, then calmed our fears.
And now, to end this hymn of praise,
Let every mystery lover raise
His glass to the kings of the mystery scene—
That talented team called Ellery Queen!
And if some writers whose work you love
Are not included in those above,
We'll sing their praise at another time—
For, to tell the truth, their names don't rhyme.

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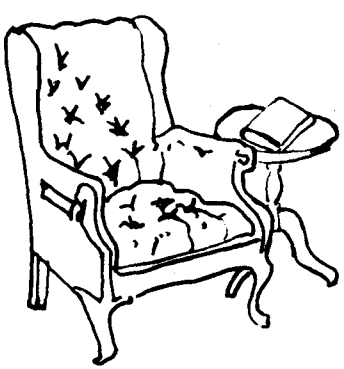

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a *NEW* short story by

PATRICIA HIGHSMITH

In a piece about Patricia Highsmith in the June 12, 1988 New York Times Magazine, *Joan Dupont wrote: "It's hard to pin down what happens in a Highsmith book, for almost nothing does. Are they thrillers? Mysteries? Murder is not really the point; it is merely a metaphor. The novels are hardly whodunits, since we always know who did it—or will be driven to do it. The mystery is in the protagonist's mind, his makeup. We sympathize with him and hope he will not be found out. Often, he isn't. Life might even get better for him."*

Well, let's see. "A Safety in Numbers" is a short story, not a novel. And it concerns not one murderer but three . . .

A SAFETY IN NUMBERS

by PATRICIA HIGHSMITH

They planned it, scheduled it for a certain weekend in October, which happened to be Laura's birthday weekend, since her birthday fell on the Friday. Laura, her sister Mary who was an interpreter at the U.N. in Manhattan, and their brother, Joel, a doctor, were going to visit their father, Gordon Sommersby, and do it. They had talked about it before, of course, jokingly, years ago. Then they had finally discussed it seriously this summer, with quick and anxious glances into one another's eyes—was each of them in earnest, or maybe hesitant, and when the chips were down going to back out, even welsh on his or her siblings? The earnestness prevailed. They had even shaken hands, spontaneously. It would not, could not be said that any one of them had been the instigator. Their father was disliked by all three of them. He was like an ogre in a

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fairy tale—disagreeable, demanding, and stingy, too—fantastically stingy.

Together they elected to give him a fatal push down the stairs. It was the most likely accident in the two-story country house, and so much simpler than arranging a car accident in which he might be nudged off a cliff—of which there were a couple in the vicinity, but what a mess with cars and possible witnesses!

What spurred them on were memories of their father's selfishness in the past, his callous treatment of their mother. He had even refused to lend a next-door neighbor a rake in leafy autumn season, and the children remembered from their adolescence the astonished expression on their neighbor's face. Gordon had never been good at making friends with the neighbors, or with anybody. The fact was that nobody liked him. But he did have the three children—Laura, Joel, and Mary—remembered their birthdays, and fairly commanded them to his house in Hatterstown, New York, on their birthdays and on his, and at Christmas. Mary was married, but with no children as yet. Her husband didn't care for Gordon, so Mary didn't always partake of Christmas dinner at Gordon's. The other two skipped out of these events as often as they dared. They had to keep up a facade of respect for their father, they supposed, though for whom they were maintaining the facade, or trying to, was a question.

The three of them came to their father's house on that Friday afternoon in October separately, as only Joel had a car and used it, while the two sisters—on the same train from Penn Station, as it happened—didn't meet until they got off at Hatterstown. It was a short and pleasant walk up some stairs, onto the country road to their father's house.

"Hello, Dad, we're here!" Mary cried from the downstairs hall. She had a key and had used it after raps with the brass-monkey doorknocker had produced no response.

"Hello, Mary! —That you?" Gordon's voice called from somewhere upstairs. "I'll be down in a minute!"

Mary and Laura exchanged mischievous smiles, the kind they had given each other many a weekend before, as if to say, "Let's do our best—and hope for the best this time."

Their father's "I'll be down in a minute" usually meant at least ten, because he sometimes put on a clean shirt and changed from jeans into trousers. The two sisters said hello to Ada, who was busy in the kitchen (she'd had the blender on, she said, and hadn't heard

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their knock, but the truth was she was getting deaf), then went up to their rooms to open their overnight cases and wash their hands. There were two bathrooms upstairs, both off the main hall.

Gordon was a tyrant, Laura was thinking as she ran a comb quickly through her brown hair. He was apt to sound off about their neglect of him, even at the table after a good dinner and only a moderate amount of wine. He was now sixty-four and limping from an encounter with a bear in Canada, a bear he had finally shot. The siblings had more than once wished that the bear had gotten the better of him. Gordon had founded the Gordian Paper Company, which relied on Canadian wood, was based in upstate New York, and had made him a millionaire in his mid-thirties. But there was no sign of affluence in the children's existence now; nor had there ever been, and not much sign in the Hatterstown estate of three acres, either, though Gordon did have a part-time gardener and a housekeeper-cook—Ada—who took Saturdays and Sundays off, did not sleep in, and lived in the village. What did Gordon do with his money? He invested, and made more and more.

The brother and sisters supposed that they were due something on their father's death—how much they didn't know. Joel had once said jokingly, "It could be just one dollar each, you know, to get rid of us legally. I've heard of that." And his sisters had bent double with appreciative laughter. That would have been just like their father.

But a desire for money was not their motivation. They resented their father's demands on them, which they labeled either sentimental or foolish—such as making them feel guilty if they didn't visit at Thanksgiving and Christmas. Most of all, they resented what Gordon had done to their well meaning and self-sacrificing mother—namely, worked her to an early death. Laura remembered hearing from her mother that Gordon hadn't accompanied her to the hospital when she was about to give birth to Laura because he'd had a business appointment. "Men have their own work, you know," Julia had said tolerantly, with a smile at Laura. She had taken a taxi to the hospital, she explained. Their mother had been not only wife, mother, and housekeeper-cook, but had learned to drive in order to be Gordon's unpaid chauffeuse, had mastered the sewing machine (though she disliked sewing), had learned how to do electrical repairs, again so as to save money, and how (with the aid of government pamphlets of proverbial obfuscation) to make up income-tax returns for Gordon. All this had taken its toll on her.

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Gordon had admitted no luxuries, ploughing every cent of profit back into the paper business.

Then, in a fit of impatience or economy or both, he had had the family cat, Tomkins, put down, unwilling to pay for an intestinal operation—which the vet had said wouldn't be serious, as the blockage was due to a hairball. The sudden absence of Tomkins, a white cat with brindle-and-black markings, had made a strong impression on Joel, Laura, and Mary, then between the ages of ten and fourteen. A photograph of Tomkins, in black-and-white and nearly life-size, still stood on a hall bookcase top, a really fine portrait of the cat's head and neck. Their mother had taken the picture and been quite proud of it.

Laura didn't mention Tomkins, but she saw her sister take a lingering look at it. "We'll be downstairs, Dad!" she called to his closed door.

Joel had just arrived and had been admitted by Ada. "How are things?" he asked his sisters, smiling. "Laura—for you." He held out a square green-and-white-striped box, taken from a shopping bag.

"Joel, you're a dear," said Laura. "It looks expensive."

"It isn't," he told her, shaking his head, deadpan. He had dark straight hair and round-rimmed glasses.

It was 7:35. Ada had wheeled the drinks cart near the sofa. Sometimes they had drinks, sometimes not. Gordon liked wine at dinner and that was about it, as his doctor--who was not Joel—had warned him about high blood-pressure or overweight or some such.

"And this from me," said Mary. She produced a blue-paper-wrapped package from her large handbag. "Happy birthday, Laura."

"Thank you both," said Laura, delighted and a little nervous at the same time. "When should I open them?"

"Oh, let's wait for Gordon," said Joel, and took a stride toward the drinks cart. "Anyone for sherry?"

The two women laughed. Laura wanted scotch and plain water, Mary a gin and tonic. Then, as Joel poured a small straight bourbon for himself, they heard their father descending the stairs.

Gordon gripped the banister firmly, favoring his left leg. "Hello, children! Well, we're all here!"

"Hello, Dad," said Joel, and this was echoed by his sisters, one of whom added, "Nice to be here again."

Gordon came down the last step a bit stiffly, with a pleasant expression that looked deliberate. "Happy birthday, Laura."

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"Thank you—Dad."

"Your present isn't here. Ordered but not here. Stationery. Sorry."

Laura smiled. "It's the thought that counts. —A glass of wine, Dad?"

Gordon accepted.

Ada brought in black olives, anchovies.

They lifted glasses. "To Laura—many happy returns!"

Seen in the corner of Laura's eye, her father's lumpy figure, now seated on the sofa, inspired only distaste in her, a wish that he weren't here. In fact, her feeling was a more active antipathy. If Gordon weren't here, if he had died first, their sunny, delightful mother might be. "A thought!" she cried. "Let's remember Mother this evening—our mother, who produced us all!"

Mary got up from her chair. Joel was still on his feet. Gordon didn't move, but said, chuckling, "I had something to do with it, too, you know, but, yes, here's to Julia."

They drank.

Then the presents were opened. Joel's gift was a silver mustard pot with a tiny silver spoon to go with it.

"Elegant!" Laura said, really impressed, and gave her brother a kiss on the cheek. "Thank you, dear Joel."

Then Mary's present, a book. This was a statesman's biography that Laura had said weeks ago that she would like to buy for herself. Laura was a free-lance journalist. "You remembered, Mary. Thank you."

The dinner went off well, as the children had been brought up to be "agreeable at mealtime, no matter what." Ada was her friendly, respectable self, replying pleasantly when she was spoken to, serving the three courses perfectly. She was in her early fifties and had been working for Gordon for about five years.

"And how's business for all of you?" Gordon asked genially during dessert. "You, Joel—have you saved any lives lately?"

Joel gave an amused glance at his sisters. "As a matter of fact, thank you for asking, Dad. I—yes, I did the right thing in Intensive Care the other day. A Parkinson's case collapsed, but it was an internal problem, nothing to do with the Parkinson's—not directly, anyway."

"Go on," said Gordon, who took an interest in things medical. He wasn't wearing his usual glasses, which gave his eyes a grey, naked look. They were framed by greying brows, wrinkling pockets under

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them. Gordon's face was sturdy still, but it had never been handsome. The plaid woollen shirt, even with a solid-green tie, did little to make him look neatly attired. He had never bothered about clothes.

"I can't," said Joel, looking his father in the eye. "It's too complicated. But the fellow pulled out of it. I don't know about the next one."

In the following seconds, Laura sensed that her father might be thinking about his fight with the grizzly some twenty years ago. And her sister Mary, turning the stem of her wine glass, might be thinking about his death—tomorrow, sometime, on those stairs.

"And what do you mean by the next one?" asked Gordon, his full pink underlip looking redder than usual after a good meal and wine.

"Well, we all have a n-next one," said Joel. "And finally a last one. Even you and I," he ended with a smile.

"True," said Mary.

Laura looked at her sister, whose trim figure sat erect, her neat head handsome with small silver earrings. Mary sat where their mother had always sat, which put her opposite Gordon, while she and Joel were at their usual places, Joel on his father's right. Laura imagined her mother sitting where she always had, listening to them, probably twigging something in tonight's atmosphere. Their mother had been genial and able to smile even in tired moments, but she had also been sensitive to moods, intuitive as to future actions. Laura thought suddenly that her father might be suspecting something, too. Were his eyes a little narrower and quicker this evening, or was that her imagination?

Coffee in the living room. Joel didn't take coffee at night, but the others did. Laura sat on the sofa, leaning against a pillow whose cover, which had a zipper well concealed, had been embroidered by their mother—a lovely flower design of pale-blue and pink.

Mary, in response to a question by her father, was telling about her week at the U.N., her bright eyes occasionally looking at Laura with amusement in them. "Then the *Frenchman,* who was by now getting impatient—"

Laura was thinking of their mother, of that last illness that had felled her, here, in this house. She had been shoveling snow so that their father could get his car out of the driveway the next morning—rather, so that she could get it out with Gordon riding beside her. The snow had still been coming down, she remembered someone

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saying. Laura and her brother and sister had been away at school. And Gordon had been busy on the telephone.

Business in New York? Business somewhere. Couldn't he have ordered a taxi for the next morning, or switched on the driveway lights and attacked the snow himself, whatever the hour? But no, little Julia had had to attack it. She'd had a cold to begin with, and the snow-shoveling had made it go into bronchitis and then pneumonia. Antibiotics hadn't done the trick, as if she had expended every ounce of her reserve in tackling the snow, which Gordon could have hired a man—or even a child—to shovel. Laura remembered her father's anxious, concerned expression as he bent over their mother in the hospital and imagined him thinking, This time she's gone. My servant, my helpmeet—my slave. But Gordon would never have admitted to himself or anyone that he used Julia as a slave.

When were they going to attack Gordon, she wondered. Tomorrow after lunch, when he sometimes climbed the stairs to take a rest? She hadn't had a chance to be alone with Joel and Mary as yet to set the time or decide on a signal.

"Game of chess, Joel?" asked Gordon.

Joel gave a short sigh. "I don't think so, Dad, if you'll excuse me. I had a long day. Tomorrow maybe."

Laura observed all three: Joel on his feet now, ready to say goodnight probably, their father motionless in the big armchair to the right of the fireplace, with its good view of the TV screen on the left of the sofa. A silence fell. Laura set her cup and saucer on the coffee table. They had all said goodnight to Ada half an hour ago—a goodbye and thank you, really, since Ada wouldn't be back till Monday morning and the three intended to leave late Sunday afternoon, or so they had said to Ada.

"Well—" Gordon stood up and pushed his woollen shirt under his belt with a thumb "—it's been an interesting evening." The remark was cool.

Joel and Laura exchanged a glance.

Then Joel said, "That was a good dinner. Thank you, Dad. Or thank Ada."

Gordon walked toward the stairway and turned before he quite reached it. "By the way, I—I know what the three of you are thinking tonight." There was a long pause. "So don't think I don't," he nodded as if to corroborate himself.

It was Mary who spoke first. *"Thinking?"*

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Gordon nodded again. "Yes." He turned and began to climb the stairs.

Laura stood up. Mary was already on her feet. Something flinty and straight passed among them by the time Gordon was halfway up the stairs. *It's now,* was the message. Now or never, and therefore action was the order.

Laura moved first, somewhat to the surprise of her brother and sister. She simply walked briskly to the stairway and brushed past her father, who had not yet reached the upper steps. Joel and Mary came right behind her. "What's this?" said Gordon, surprised, and definitely angry. Laura, with her feet firmly on the upstairs landing, gave her father a shove in the chest. Joel and Mary were near enough to add to his fall—at least Joel did, with a blow like a boxer's against Gordon's shoulder. Mary's effort missed.

Gordon went flying, was even upside down in midair for a moment—then came a terrible thud and he lay motionless on the floor below.

The two women looked at their brother, whose eyes were fixed on their father—Joel was, after all, a doctor. He hurried down the stairs, bent, and felt for a pulse in Gordon's right wrist. He took some seconds over this.

"He's dead," Joel said. He looked up at his sisters.

Laura let her held breath out. Then she descended the stairs. "We should call the police, shouldn't we?" asked Mary. "Or the hospital?"

"Both, Joel?" asked Laura.

Murmurings, all talking at once, but calmly, as if it were the most natural thing in the world that their father lay dead on the front-hall floor, as if he had fallen by accident. That, after all, was what they had to stick to.

Within fifteen minutes, the police were there, followed soon by a white ambulance.

"He fell backward, he was almost at the top step," said Joel.

One of the hospital crew said that his neck had been broken. A little blood had come from a cut on the back of his head. The police asked all three if they had seen their father fall, and the answer was yes. They didn't ask if they saw him trip—after all, Gordon Sommersby was in his sixties and had a limp, which Mary, Joel, Laura, and Ada could affirm, and so could anyone in the area who had ever seen him walking. It was feasible that his left leg had let

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him down suddenly. There was a long scar on the side of that leg, Laura knew.

Ada telephoned. She had heard and seen the ambulance rush past her house and wondered if everything was all right at the house? Laura, who'd answered, told her it wasn't, that Mr. Sommersby had fallen to his death down the stairs. No, Ada's help wasn't needed at the moment, but they would probably be in touch with her tomorrow.

"That's terrible news," said Ada.

"Yes," Laura agreed. "Yes." And she thanked Ada.

A policeman who seemed to know Gordon at least by sight and by name took the names and addresses of Joel and his two sisters. He said that their father's body would have to go to the morgue of a police station in a nearby town that was larger than Hatterstown. "It's routine for the forensic," he said.

"How soon should we notify the undertaker?" Laura asked. Did they even know of one in the neighborhood? She thought not.

The police officer said that would be best after the forensic department had made its report, probably by tomorrow afternoon. The last to leave after the removal of the body, he said goodnight.

Laura's thoughts were of signs of a blow on the body—Joel's, or even of her own push against his chest. But couldn't a pink mark have come anywhere from Gordon's awkward tumble down the stairs?

Joel pushed his fingers through his hair, took off his glasses and wiped them, then put them back on. "I should make a telephone call." He telephoned his secretary to say he wasn't sure if or when on Monday he would be able to come to the office. He told her what had happened and said that if there were any emergencies, she should ring him in Hatterstown.

The sisters didn't use the telephone, and Mary said something about preferring to tell her husband face to face. Joel could have waited until tomorrow to telephone his secretary, Laura thought, since he, like herself and Mary, wasn't expected home until Sunday evening, and this was only Friday. It seemed a sign of Joel's nervousness. Of course, they were all nervous, though they didn't talk about it.

By midnight, the dishwasher had almost finished its cycle, Laura had scrubbed the pots and pans, and Mary had set the table for breakfast (one place less this time), as on many a weekend evening. The kitchen looked as usual, Laura thought.

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"What about that cousin of Gordon's?" Joel asked, drying the last pot and putting it on its hook over the counter. "Rupert? In Ohio?"

"I haven't heard Gordon mention him in years," said Mary. Gordon had had one brother, but he was now dead.

"We've got to take a look at his appointments book—all that," said Joel. "And of course his lawyer. And his accountant— What's his name, Firbanks?"

"But tomorrow, don't you think, Joel?" asked Mary.

There was a short silence. Tomorrow, or a quick look now in the big desk with at least eight drawers in Gordon's bedroom? There was something played out among them—not that they were tired, but to look at papers would be a different act from the one they had just completed. Curtain down, for tonight.

The next morning they breakfasted as usual when in the Hatterstown house around 9:00. Tea for Joel, coffee for the sisters, toast and marmalade. They'd look at the desk this morning, they said.

And they did. It was a large desk with green-baize top in an old-fashioned style, five drawers on the left and five on the right, a wide one in the middle. Bank papers, statements of bond and stock listings and earnings.

"It's in order for us to be looking at this, isn't it?" asked Mary.

After a second of hesitation, Joel laughed. "If not us, then who? We're the nearest of kin, we're the heirs."

Laura was smiling, too, and for some reason she laughed at the word "heirs." She realized that she had no desire for her father's money—*none,* not even for anything that had belonged to him, like cufflinks or a ring.

Old and still older bank papers, Gordian Paper Company statements galore—no doubt in order, as the company made a profit. Firbanks and Stark, accountants and lawyers, that was it. Then, in the bottom left drawer, they found a thick manila envelope with *Last Will and Testament* written on it in Gordon's hand. Mary, who found it, handed it to Joel. "Your pleasure."

Joel unwound the string that went round the closure and pulled out a typed manuscript. "Twenty-three pages long!" he said and began to glance through it. He stood as he read it. "What d'you know?" he said when he had turned about twenty pages. "We get twenty-five thousand dollars each." He whipped off his glasses and turned to his sisters, laughing.

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It was a surprise of sorts. But Laura said calmly, "*I'm* not interested."

"We must all think of our favorite charity," Mary said.

"And wait for this." Joel held up a forefinger. "Ada gets ten thousand."

"Good! She deserves it!" said Mary.

"And," Joel continued, "the house goes to the local library—" he was reading " '—to house a joint or subsidiary branch of the existing Hatterstown Library, which is locally supported and not a branch of the nationwide public libraries.' "

"Bravo!" said Laura. "Who'd have thought he'd do something like that?"

The other two had paused to reflect, and Laura supposed they were thinking, as she was, Goodbye to this house, goodbye to the lawn and the trees—which, after all, they'd known since they were in their early teens. "After all," she said finally, "Mother worked herself to death here. I think of that every time I come here, frankly."

"I feel the same way," Mary said, suddenly her feisty self again. "Who wants this house when it's so steeped in memories of Gordon—for me, anyway. And not nice memories."

"I'm with you," said her brother. "Have we had enough Will and Testament?"

They agreed that Firbanks and Stark should handle the rest, that they should tell the firm they had looked at the papers in their father's desk but had taken nothing away.

After that, their mood was lighter. A few more telephone calls were made, one of them Mary to her husband, as she had changed her mind and decided to tell him now about her father's death. There were a few, a very few items that had belonged to their mother—these the children thought they might be allowed to keep, because they were of small value: a little silver box for stamps, a mirror with a filigree frame which certainly would not be needed in a library. Family photograph albums, of course.

And books. There was the family Bible from Julia's side of the family, a sturdy hardcover volume with a few generations' birth and death dates written in it. Surely Gordon wouldn't have donated that to the Hatterstown Library? But they intended to wait and ask the accounting firm about all the items. They knew Gordon had a trust, which probably Firbanks and Stark were managing.

The three set off for New York on Sunday afternoon, after speak-

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ing with Ada, though saying nothing about her legacy. The forensic department had posed no questions, but Gordon's insurance company—there was an accident-insurance policy on which the company stood to pay out a whacking sum—visited Laura, Joel, and Mary separately in Manhattan on Monday, the same man going to considerable trouble to make an appointment with each of them.

Monday evening the brother and sisters compared notes. It seemed that they had all told exactly the same story: Gordon had said goodnight first and had gone up the stairs while the others had stayed to finish their coffee in the living room. They had heard a heavy bump on the floor of the front hall. One of them mentioned hearing a short cry as one might make when about to fall. The others didn't mention it, but that didn't seem to bother the insurance people.

Without rehearsing, they had all told the same story. The insurance money was to go into the Gordian Paper Company, whence the premiums had been paid out.

"Wouldn't you know?" said Joel.

"Yes, but who wants any of it?" replied Laura. "After all, we're allowed to keep Mother's nice little things."

"You're right. They're worth more," said Mary, dead earnest. "They're worth everything."

"And the books—or all we care to take." Joel had talked with Firbanks and Stark about that. The Hatterstown Library hadn't made an inventory or claimed any books. The furniture went with the house, the children felt. They weren't in love with any particular object—perhaps because it had been shared with Gordon. Let the library people dispose of it.

The funeral took place on Tuesday morning on Long Island. There were three or four executives from the Gordian Paper Company present who Joel, Mary, and Laura had met maybe once before and almost forgotten. And Ada had troubled to come, which the three thought lovely of her. Of the Hatterstown folk, there was only the postmaster, who had driven Ada.

Ada said to Laura: "I've seen Mr. Sommersby slip once or twice near the top of those stairs—as if his bad leg was getting tired."

Laura nodded, wordless. Her brother and sister had heard what Ada had said. To Laura's mind, it fortified their story that their father had made a misstep near the top of the stairs and fallen backward. And Ada would no doubt repeat the remark a dozen times to her friends and neighbors in Hatterstown.

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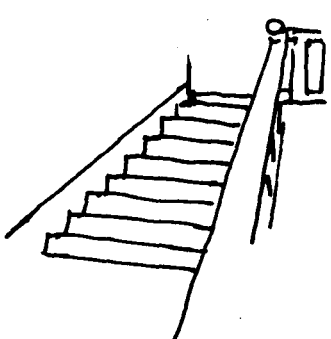
During a roadside-restaurant lunch that day, Laura said to Joel and Mary, "It *is* nice that he made that civic gesture—donating the house to the Library. We must think of the rosier side."

They did. They found themselves happier that day and in the weeks that followed. None of them mentioned the accident on the stairs again to the others. Their father's death had its importance as a demarcation, but his fall faded into the background and became a household accident which could occur any day of the week in the most orderly of homes. Mary's husband had voiced that very sentiment when she'd told him of Gordon's fall.

Laura never had any pangs of guilt for what she'd helped to do. And, as far as she knew, neither did the others. Was it because the silence and correct behavior of each was important to the safety of the others? Laura liked to think it was that: a silent conspiracy, because they certainly hadn't spent much time talking about it beforehand. Nor had there been any great planning. It had just been right somehow, and simple.

When Laura's stationery arrived about a month after Gordon's funeral (package forwarded by the Library), a bill came with it, as Gordon had apparently intended to pay upon delivery. Laura paid the bill. And after a few seconds' revulsion and anger, she decided not to throw the notepaper away, but to keep it and use it. Why be petty about petty things?



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a ***NEW*** short story by

GEORGE BAXT

Reba and Calvin Barry were unique in Dimplechin. They had a smile and a greeting and a good word for everyone. They were especially admired because not once were they heard to say, "Have a good day!" Reba was an incredibly obese woman and yet never was seen wearing stretch pants. She wore her obesity well camouflaged by kaftans, Hawaiian mumus, and yards and yards of tulle. Like so many huge women, she wore oversized jewelry, such as earrings that dangled to her shoulders as miniature trompe l'oeils. She was light on her feet and had very skilled hands. There wasn't anything she couldn't fix . . .

WIDOW'S PIQUE

by GEORGE BAXT

Dimplechin nestled snugly and smugly in the heart of New York's Catskill Mountains. It was another of those mongrel villages created by shrewd realtors over the past decade to lure the high livers of the urban middle class with seductive promises of low-cost housing in a select and restricted community. The split-level homes in time nurtured splitting headaches and splitting households. The shoddy constructions were a disgrace and provided fodder for the *New York Times'* Sunday real-estate section for months. In time it came to the attention of stand-up comics, especially those confined to screamingly unfunny cable presentations. In their wake came the sit-down comics, the amateur funny folk who reigned in the local Dimplechin bars and restaurants that had sprung up almost overnight when some clever restaurant people realized the very atmosphere of the village would drive its inhabitants to drink.

After the first few years, Dimplechin learned to accept its bastard

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notoriety and most of the inhabitants would proudly announce anywhere and for any reason, "I live in Dimplechin!" Soon there were Dimplechin dolls, Dimplechin boxer shorts for men, Dimplechin cosmetics for women, Dimplechin ice cream, and, last but not least, the Dimplechin coconut cookie, now an intercontinental favorite for people of no taste whatsoever.

Then, of course, came the Dimplechin Country Club and Golf Course, spread over twenty acres with a membership waiting list of five years. Of course, cliques developed, treasuring their exclusivity with the zealousness of a stubborn virgin. Alice and Dixon Farr ruled their Gang of Eight with iron fists and tight smiles. Dixon was a literary agent, representing a small but highly lucrative clientele. Among his authors was the highly respected thriller author from the Netherlands, Hennie Tec Dubrat. Her titles never failed to lead the bestseller lists and her frequent visits from abroad to stay with the Farrs caused the inevitable in-fighting among the select of Dimplechin. Invitations to a Farr party were as eagerly sought after as a tout's tips at the racetrack. (Few people knew that Hennie Tec Dubrat as a teenager in Amsterdam had been one of the city's most notorious Van Gogh Gogh dancers.)

As usually happens in tightly knit communities like Dimplechin, there were those who admired their social leaders and an equal number who loathed and envied them. Bess Poole both loathed and admired the Farrs. She and her husband Tom, a stockbroker constantly under investigation, frequently met in the city for dinner and the theater. Dixon Farr, with his connections, could get house seats to all the biggest hits, which meant they saw very little on Broadway. Off Broadway and Off Off Broadway had to make do. Like the Farrs, the Pooles were childless. The Pooles had cats—three cats. Wynken, Blynken, and Nod were as vicious and mean-spirited as their masters.

Jane and Barney Leigh were the third couple in the Farr inner circle of eight. Barney inherited a vast fortune from his grandmother, a celebrated pyromaniac. (She would buy buildings, insure them, and then torch them. By the time they caught up with her, her coffin was sliding smoothly into an incinerator.) So Barney played golf, puttered in the garden, enjoyed his poker games, and cheated on his wife with massage-parlor hostesses. The Leighs' was the only house in Dimplechin that didn't spring leaks. Jane Leigh designed greeting cards and did rather well at it. Their only child, a rotten kid of fourteen named Eulalie, had been sent away to school

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in Switzerland. The Leighs lost the address shortly after Eulalie's departure, and, with a shrug and perhaps a sigh of relief, lost touch with their awful daughter. Had they but known, Eulalie thrived as the youngest brothel keeper in Berne.

Reba and Calvin Barry were the fourth couple of this benighted octet. The Barrys were unique in Dimplechin. They had a smile and a greeting and a good word for everyone. They were especially admired because not once were they heard to say, "Have a good day!" Reba was an incredibly obese woman and yet never was seen wearing stretch pants. She wore her obesity well camouflaged by kaftans, Hawaiian mumus, and yards and yards of tulle. Like so many huge women, she wore oversized jewelry, such as earrings that dangled to her shoulders as miniature trompe l'oeils. She was light on her feet and had very skilled hands. There wasn't anything she couldn't fix. Her pals didn't need the service of garages, plumbers, roto-rooter technicians, or whatever—an emergency call to Reba and she'd squeeze behind the wheel of her pickup truck and zoom off to the rescue, leaving behind a cloud of dust with a Valkyrian "Yo-ho-to-ho" at the top of her lungs that bounced back and forth across the valleys and dales of the Catskills.

Reba's husband Calvin was a different story. Calvin collected and traded old coins and rare stamps and made tons of money because he was a cheat. Hennie Tec Dubrat, the authoress, hated him because she was positive he had underpaid her for a rare Indian Anna she had lifted from a collection of the late Indira Gandhi while that venerable lady was prone on a carpet praying to Mecca.

"I've put a curse on Calvin Barry," Hennie confided to Alice Farr.

Alice chuckled. She had brilliantly refined the art of chuckling because her actual laugh was a cross between a donkey's bray and a shriek for help.

"Don't you chuckle at me," said Hennie. Her eyes narrowed and her upper lip curled into a trace of a dangerous sneer.

"Hennie, we've been friends for a long time. You know I'm not a superstitious person. I don't believe in curses."

"You better believe in mine." Hennie leaned forward conspiratorially, though they were having tea out on the Farr patio and there wasn't another soul in sight. "Mine were handed down from an ancestor who possessed the evil eye."

Alice was amused, which was rare for Alice. "I thought evil eyes were confined to Italians."

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Hennie folded her arms and said solemnly, "There's no monopoly on evil eyes." She took a bite of chocolate cake and, after licking the five fingers of her right hand, said: "Calvin Barry will never cheat again."

"Oh, he doesn't cheat," scoffed Alice, "he's just a good businessman, that's all. And how would you like it if Meryl Streep put a curse on you because you insist on having a clause in all your contracts that under no circumstance is she to be permitted in a film version of your novels."

"It's not Meryl Streep. It's that other one—Molly Ringworm."

"Ringwald. Hennie, didn't you know Calvin is deathly ill?"

"How deathly?"

"His prognosis is negative." She sighed and added with her usual unbecoming relish, "It won't be long now."

Hennie was ingesting more chocolate cake. "When did you hear he was dying?"

Alice stared at the sky, where presumably her response was written. "I think it was at the bridge party at the Leighs. Now let me think. That was—um—a week ago Tuesday."

Hennie roared triumphantly, "I cursed him a week ago Monday!"

Alice chuckled. "Hennie, you don't get cancer overnight."

"Mine you do."

Alice shrugged and looked at her wristwatch. "The men should be back soon."

"What men?"

"My Dixon and Tom Poole. They drive into the city and back every day. Calvin used to be part of the pool, but now that he's too ill—" Her voice drifted away as she stared out to the horizon and was quietly lost to Hennie. Annoyed, Hennie, who required constant attendance, snapped her fingers. Alice's eyes met her guest's. "Sorry. I was thinking of my dinner party."

Hennie bristled slightly. "I suppose the Barrys are invited."

Alice studied her fingernails. "Actually, they're not."

"Oh, really? But I thought they were an integral part of your charmed circle."

"Well, actually, dear, there's nothing very charming about a circle when one of the members is dying. It makes everyone else so uncomfortable."

Hennie said nothing. She leaned back in her chair and watched a hawk making lazy circles in the sky, wondering if the predator knew something she didn't know . . .

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Reba and Calvin Barry's white elephant was at the end of a dead-end road off the main highway. It was secluded, quiet, and enchantingly ugly. Behind the house was a lily pond, a refuge for a family of frogs. When Reba learned her husband was terminally ill, she evicted the frogs because the word "croaking" was a constant reminder of her husband's fate.

Calvin sat in a wheelchair near the lily pond staring into space while Reba sat on the grass a few feet away from him, solemnly taking apart a faulty lawn mower.

"Reba?"

His voice was weak and faint and Reba fought hard to suppress the sob rising in her throat.

"Yes, precious."

"I don't want you staying home all the time just because of me. I don't like you turning down all these invitations."

Reba almost exploded. All *what* invitations? Our beloved pals, she thought, our buddies, our chums, our *friends* have consigned me to Coventry. You're a dying man, my old darling, and they don't want anything of death to come near them. "Calvin dear," she said, surprised at the absence of venom in her voice, "I've told you a dozen times, I don't enjoy going out if you're not with me. Would you like me to mix you a chocolate milk?"

"No, Reba." He was silent. "You know what I would like you to do, my big sweetheart?"

"What, darling?"

"Get even."

"Now you're talking, Calvin. That's my Calvin. That's my old lover. Calvin? Calvin?" She was on her feet, walking slowly toward the wheelchair. *"Oh, my God!"* Her dolorous yo-ho-to-ho rang through the valley and enveloped the village of Dimplechin, where everyone now knew Calvin Barry had been summoned by the Great Numismatist in the Sky.

Reverend Allan Kribb conducted tasteful services for the departed Calvin Barry. At Reba's request, he kept the eulogy to a swift three minutes because she expected none of the old gang to show up. Much to her surprise, Calvin departed from a full house. Everyone was there. Alice and Dixon Farr, Bess and Tom Poole, Jane and Barney Leigh, and, to Reba's astonishment, Hennie Tec Dubrat, who was strutting about Dimplechin like a peacock, taking credit for the hasty dispatch of Calvin Barry. The church wasn't a large one, so

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the overflow had to be accommodated with a loudspeaker for the unfortunate few who couldn't join the sell-out house inside.

That night, Reba could think of nothing but the hypocrisy. The Pooles, the Leighs, the Farrs, and the authoress dropped in with food and drink and unctuous solicitude—along with a number of total strangers who came to pay their respects because it was a dull night for television. Dixon Farr, who had a stamp collection of his own and coveted that of the freshly departed, had the bad taste to offer to buy some of Calvin's collection while his soul was still in transit. Reba filed his bad taste away for future reference and only said softly, "Philately will get you nowhere." Her guests ate and drank to excess, every so often one of them remembering to take her hand and say something comforting that totally discomfited her.

Alice Farr said, "It's the best thing that could have happened. Now he's at peace."

Bess Poole said, "Dear Reba, now he's with the angels," making it sound as though he'd been traded to a baseball team.

Jane Leigh was equally original. "Time heals all wounds, dear. You must be brave and look to the future."

Look to the future, thought Reba. Get even, said Calvin. Reba smiled at them all. She even smiled at Hennie Tec Dubrat.

The following morning, Reba was surprised to receive an invitation to lunch with Alice Farr. They met at the Ye Olde Olde, which was so named because the proprietress was an octogenarian.

Reba toyed with a salad. "Why, Reba, where's your appetite?" Alice asked the freshly minted widow.

"I guess it was cremated with Calvin."

Alice chided Reba. "You mustn't be so morbid, dear. The death of a loved one will befall all of us." Reba nodded her head in agreement. "I know how I'd feel if I lost my Dixon. Now, Reba, you've got to get back into the swim of things. You've been away from our circle much too long."

"Not by choice."

Alice ignored the barb. "We all admire you, Reba. You're a martyr."

Martyr, thought Reba, rambling rose of the wildwood.

Alice ploughed on undiplomatically. "We've got to get those hands of yours back to work."

Reba said matter-of-factly, "I'm working on my lawn mower. Cal-

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vin's death interrupted me. I got back to it this morning. Aren't my fingernails a mess?"

"I just love it when your fingernails are a mess, Reba. Now listen, darling. Dixon's Cadillac is acting up. He says it needs to be fine-tuned a bit—and what finer tuner of Cadillacs is there in all of Dimplechin than our own Reba Barry?"

"Alice, you're too kind. I'd be delighted to give the Caddie a once-over-lightly."

Two days later, when the Cadillac stood in the Farr driveway, where Reba had parked it that morning, Hennie Tec Dubrat announced she would join Dixon Farr and Tom Poole on the drive into the city. "But, Hennie darling," Alice remonstrated halfheartedly, "there's no need to go back so soon. Please stay a bit longer. It'll be so lonely without you."

Hennie scoffed. "You and your ladies will have plenty to do, drowning Reba Barry in pity."

"That's not kind, Hennie," said Alice sharply, wincing from the sting of Hennie's well aimed dart.

"There's no holding me back, I'm so compulsive," Hennie said.

"Then I'll help you pack," Alice told her. She hoped she didn't sound too eager.

From their terrace, Jane and Barney Leigh watched the Cadillac heading down the steep incline toward the main highway. Jane shaded her eyes from the sun. "Am I nuts or is Dixon's Caddie swaying a bit out of control?"

Barney got out of the lawn chair and crossed to his wife. "He's driving like he's drunk."

"Oh!" Jane screamed. "He's heading straight over the edge! Oh, Barney! Call emergency!"

The Cadillac plunged over the edge, heading straight for the ravine hundreds of feet below. In the back seat, Hennie Tec Dubrat in uncontrollable anger slapped Dixon Farr on the side of his head. Tom Poole suffered a heart attack and was spared the agony that awaited the others. In the blazing inferno, Dixon thought of his insurance policies and decided Alice would have no trouble finding a second husband.

Like the aftermath of an atomic bomb, the smoke of the burning wreckage formed a huge mushroom that could be seen from miles around. Over the ensuing silence could be heard a triumphant yo-ho-to-ho . . .

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At the memorial service, Reba said to Alice Farr, "It's the best thing that could have happened. Now he's at peace."

To Bess Poole she said, "Dear Bess, now he's with the angels." Bess knew she didn't have a baseball team in mind.

A dumpy little Dutch woman wearing wooden sabots and earrings that were miniature windmills was in attendance, claiming to be Hennie Tec Dubrat's older sister. "Perhaps your sister was cursed," Reba told her.

"Oh, for sure—yah yah. I curse her. Ha ha."

Jane and Barney Leigh were at breakfast the next morning. Jane looked at him with love. "Barney, I'll never complain about your being at home and underfoot all the time. I mean, of the old bunch, I'm the only one—" she burst into tears "—who isn't a widow."

Barney stared at the sunny-side-up eggs which seemed to be staring right back at him and asked, "Are you sorry or are you glad?"

"Oh, Barney, don't be mean."

The phone rang, squelching an impending argument. "I'll get it." Barney pushed his chair away from the table and flung his napkin on the chair. He crossed to the wall phone and answered with a gruff hello.

"No need to snap at me, Barney."

"Oh, hello, Reba. How's Fatso this morning?" He always called her Fatso, which she bore with becoming stoicism.

"Fatso's fine."

"So what's up?"

"Well, I'll tell you, Barney. You've been on my mind since yesterday afternoon."

"Oh, yeah? After my gorgeous body?"

His wife snorted and buttered her third piece of toast.

"It's that Volvo of yours, Barney."

"What about it?"

"Well, I was driving behind you on Main Street yesterday and it seems to me your left back wheel could use a realignment."

"Really? You think so?"

"Well, haven't you noticed the car acting up a bit?"

Barney thought for a moment. "You know, come to think of it, it *has* felt a little wobbly. You want to take a look at it?"

"Sure—what are friends for? Why don't you bring it over? I'll take care of you."

"Good old Reba. I know you'll take care of me."

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a *NEW* short story by

ERNEST SAVAGE

Millie had clanked an Eisenhower buck on the counter and shoved it into his hand. Play that for me, she said, and he said he would. It was a routine between them, and every so often he'd hand her ten Eisenhowers back, saying, you hit plums, Mill. Keep her a little better than even, and keep the coffee coming. Little deals that hold the street world together.

Of Ernest Savage's only published novel to date, Two If by Sea *(Scribners, 1982), Marvin Lachman wrote: "Like his shorter work, it shows a mature writer who, in a short time, has brought new vitality to the hardboiled school . . ."*

SHANNON'S WAY

by ERNEST SAVAGE

Shannon wasn't really a bum, a street person—he had a room in the Acme Hotel next door and bought all his own food, clothes, and smokes—so he figured he could spot another guy who wasn't a bum, either, but hoped to be taken for one. Something about the eyes, and the way the body moved under the second-hand rags.

"More coffee?" Millie asked, and poured without waiting for Shannon to say yes. With his morning's bacon, eggs, hashbrowns, and toast, he'd drink it until she threw him out to make room for the lunch crowd.

"Millie," he said, "you don't watch much TV, do you?"—knowing she didn't, but needing to ask somebody, *anybody,* if they'd caught that show last night.

"When would I get the time?" she said, moving down the counter with her coffee pot. People in this neighborhood needed a lot of coffee to start their day, get their rheumy eyes open. Then the guy walked

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in, right on time, and took the same booth seat he'd taken every day for two or three weeks now.

From his stool, Shannon could watch him in the mirror on the counter wall, a big raw-boned guy with about a thirty-day beard, shaggy hair, and the usual Salvation Army outfit. Last night the man on TV had said the fugitive would likely grow a beard, like our artist's conception here—and, good God, there he was, the spitting image, Shannon knew it now for sure! Killed two people and swiped a quarter million bucks from a bank in some Iowa town. Would possibly head for Chicago, the TV man'd said, or some port city somewhere—and what was San Francisco if it wasn't that?

"You going to Reno next Monday?" Millie asked, planted bulkily in front of him again, and Shannon was surprised at how quickly his pulse settled down.

"Probably," he said, his smoker's ragged voice as even as it ever was. Twenty-five years ago he'd been a big-time electrical contractor in Kansas City, Mo. Or, rather, a *small*-time electrical contractor who sought to get big—pushed, he'd claimed then but no longer did, by a hungry, upscale wife. Then a quarter-century-long story that he could tell in a half dozen words: business, car, home, wife, daughter, and self-respect all lost in roughly that order. He'd ended up two years ago in a de-tox facility in this city beyond which you can go no farther west. Age sixty-five by then, and, as though it had been planned that way, eligible for Social Security. End of a long, long trail. But comfortable here—this, maybe, the level he'd sought all along, this dicey Tenderloin, the ever-lurking beast within, almost tame now, kept at bay with cigarettes and coffee.

Shannon went to Reno once a month, a sixty-eight-dollar round-trip by bus. You get a Class-A hotel room for the night, all the damn-near-free food you can eat, and most of the cash handed back. In return they've got you there for thirty-some hours and they consider it a profitable deal.

But Shannon almost always came back a little ahead, or only just a little behind. Push-push. He played mostly 21 or Texas Hold-em, and was good at both games, but afraid to go for the brass ring again, the big money. He'd tried that once before, hadn't he? No, he was too content with where he was and what he was: a pay-as-you-go semi-bum.

Millie had clanked an Eisenhower buck on the counter and shoved it into his hand. Play that for me, she said, and he said he would. It was a routine between them, and every so often he'd hand her

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ten Eisenhowers back, saying, you hit plums, Mill. Keep her a little better than even herself, and keep the coffee coming. Little deals that hold the street world together.

The killer was having pancakes and pork sausage, with a buck-fifty glass of orange juice to start. Not a poor man's breakfast. Shannon had been watching, and now their eyes caught and held in the mirror for more than just a moment and the guy didn't flinch, almost smiled; like come on over, let's talk.

Shannon picked up his coffee, crossed the ten feet of tiled floor to the booth, and sat down facing the man, wondering why his heart wasn't in his throat, why this unnatural cool. And why the killer's cool, the guy's jaws grinding slowly away on sausage, a forkful of pancake ready to shove in with it. Was he wrong, for God's sake?

No, he wasn't wrong, and he had the feeling that this was fated, somehow, that this guy and he were destined to meet each other, to like each other at once, and to—what? He said, "I don't suppose you got a gun on the seat beside you there, pointing at my gut, huh?" Then said a moment later, "What name belong you today, stranger?"

The man swallowed, smiled, and lowered his fork. "Call me Purley today," he said without hesitation. "And you're safe as houses sitting here. The question is, am I?"

If Shannon had a philosophy any more, it was to live and let live. With a couple of caveats thrown in, like: Watch who you do business with around here, and wash your hands often. "For a TV star," he said, "I'd hardly think so. But you are from me."

"The only clear-eyed man in the neighborhood—I take comfort from that."

"Don't take too much. But apparently you saw that show last night."

"Man, did I ever." Purley grinned. "Me and about forty other people in a saloon down the street. Watched my face grow on the screen like you'd watch Godzilla breaking through a wall. Got all tensed up for a moment, but then ordered another beer, talked to the guy on the next stool, got up, went back to the john, and hung around for another couple of hours."

"Testing?"

"Testing my luck, right. Testing all those people, and testing fate, like I am right now. All in all, I'm glad I saw it. I was skulking around before, like a wanted man should, but from now on, no more of that. Only thing is, call me Purley, if you please, and not Bascom—I'm through with him. And what name belong you?"

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"Shannon."

"Always has been?"

"Yes, always has been." Then Shannon blurted, sotto voce, "Christ, man, you killed two innocent people!"

"No." Purley had stopped eating. "Only one, and about as innocent as any other uxoricide—if that's the word. Wife-killer."

"Oh, boy."

"Yeah, you'd expect that, wouldn't you? Me telling you they got it all wrong on the show—but they did. I had no damn choice, like I got no damn choice right now—well, maybe a little more now."

Shannon paused, reviewing the tender sense of trust he had in this man, and found it still intact. Then he said, "Only *one*, huh?"

"Yes, only one—which is quite enough. You want me to tell you what really happened?"

"Will I believe it when I hear it?"

"I think you will, being who you are." Purley smiled again. "But you won't mind me finishing breakfast first, will you?"

Shannon lit a cigarette and told the man to go ahead.

"It was about eight-thirty on a Friday night," Purley (Bascom) started out. "Not a dark and stormy night, just your ordinary springtime Iowa night. But dark enough. I had a room about two blocks west of the bank and was walking to town for some supper, which is what we call it there. I'm going past the back end of the bank and there's Harry Baker, my boss, sticking two black satchels into the open trunk of his car. It didn't occur to me that he looked furtive, so I ask him what's up, could I help? And get a gun stuck in my face. He orders me into the car, behind the wheel, and we take off, going north—we're out of town in two minutes. He'd just killed his wife, and even though I didn't know that until a few minutes later I could see killer, *fresh* killer, in his eyes."

"You were scared?" Shannon asked.

"Listen, man, I was *alive*—like I'd never been before. I could almost *hear* Baker think, trying to decide my fate. I was scared, too, sure. He'd killed his wife, he told me then, but maybe a dozen times during my married life I coulda killed Helen, my wife. And vice versa. That's a totally different thing—thirty years of accumulated rage, a sudden spark, and wham! But kill me—this guy whose farm he'd foreclosed on less than a year before, then hired as a bank guard on accounta he felt so damn bad about it, and had just given a raise to?

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It takes a different type of guts—no rage in it, and no motive except to save your own skin."

But what choice did he have, Shannon wondered, and Purley said, "None. And I knew it, doing about seventy down this empty country road, and I decided to parley a bit, asking him what he planned to do, where he planned to go, telling him, hell, I didn't blame him, the way things were any more. Des Moines, he said, grab the first plane going east or south, then Costa Rica, maybe, or Brazil, someplace without extradition. 'So take me with you,' sez I, 'or give me a few bucks and let me out anyplace you want—or, hell, Harry, just let me out, no problem at all."

"Playing for time," Shannon said.

"No, Shannon, playing the game of life or death and about to lose. He was just waiting for the right moment, someplace up ahead. I knew that road like I knew the path from my old house to the barn, and up ahead was a stop sign at a road with fairly heavy Friday-evening traffic. Maybe sixty seconds away, and it'd happen before we got there. He's scrunched over against the passenger-side door, gun in his lap aimed my way, and I just pick a spot, jam on the brakes, spin the car halfway into a ditch, and we're stacked up against the dash grappling for the gun, which I never even touch before it shoots him through the heart. He's dead before the damn car settles down."

"And then what?" But Purley was reliving that moment and took one of Shannon's cigarettes from the pack on the table. There were a lot of uneaten pancakes on his plate, but he seemed to be through with food.

"First time you've told this to anybody, isn't it?" Shannon said.

"Yeah." Purley sighed. "I've relived it seven or eight hundred times, but never put it into words." He sighed again. "You believe it?"

Shannon hedged. "Well, I got to disbelieve a lot of what I heard last night, don't I? The man said you claimed you had a bad stomach Friday and left the bank at noon, told someone you'd go home and go to bed. But instead you went to Baker's house, took Mrs. Baker captive, called Harry at the bank, and told him to get a quarter million bucks together or you'd kill her. Which you do, anyway. The man said the same gun killed them both. Anyhow, Harry delivers the money and you make him drive you to some vacant barn in Illinois and kill him there. That's where they found the car, with him in it and the money gone."

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"That's where it was," Purley agreed, "just outside Peoria. That's where I began my zigzag dance all the way to here. There are vacated barns all over the Midwest, Shannon, and a lifelong farmer like me can spot one a mile away, day or night. So I put the car and him in there to buy a little time. Besides, it was Friday, and there was a good chance Harry wouldn't be missed until Monday morning, wasn't there? I mean, what with his wife dead and the bank not open on Saturday."

"Why didn't you just turn yourself in, tell them the same story you just told me?"

"I ask you again—will you believe it?"

That was hard to say. It would take trained cops to check out his bizarre tale, and all Shannon had was a liking for the man. He said, "You got any kind of prior record, any arrests?"

Purley laughed. "No. Clean as a whistle."

"Couldn't you have proven where you were all Friday afternoon?"

"No. My room's over the garage out behind my widowed landlady's house. Nobody saw me come or go, few people ever do. Plus, there was this other thing—I mean, even if I *could've* proved where I was."

"The money."

"Well, there was that for sure, but that isn't what I had in mind."

Shannon took a considered guess. "The adventure of it all, huh?"

Purley laughed again and shook his head. "Man, you can read me like a big-print book. Yessir, you're right. Listen, there I was, a fifty-seven-year-old man, born, raised, and lived all my life on that farm they took from me ten months ago. I'd been to Chicago, Des Moines, and St. Louis, but that was it, that was all. Helen'd been dead for two years, my one and only child was long gone—got the hell out of Iowa when he was twenty-one, the smart kid." Purley snubbed out the cigarette he'd barely smoked. "You see what I mean? I was *free*, man. When I said I was 'alive,' that's what I meant. Free and alive."

"With a clean conscience."

"Yessir, pure as the driven snow." Purley leaned forward, elbows on the table. "But if you or somebody else turns me in, I'll put together a defense. Like, for instance, where did Baker get those two brand-new cases he put the money in? And when? Also, maybe somebody *did* see me Friday afternoon—who knows?"

"Plus one key thing you haven't mentioned yet, Purley—"

"And probably won't, Shannon. I mean, whatever you've got in

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mind. All that'll come out if need be. Right now I've got another problem."

"How to deal with the money, right?"

"Can't get ahead of you, can I?" Purley forked up cold pancakes, hungry again. "You got any ideas?"

"Where *is* the money?"

"Here in town."

"How'd it get here?"

"U.P.S. It's in—ah, storage."

"How'd *you* get here?"

"Buses, mostly—a round dozen of 'em. And one glorious ride on a freight train." Purley, the adventurer, grinned, pleased with the train ride. "You know anything about laundering money?"

"No. You think it needs it? What is it—consecutive serial numbers, or what?"

"I've got no idea—I haven't even seen it. The first thing I did was ship it out here."

"You didn't *take* any of it?"

"I didn't need to. Baker had seventy-five-hundred bucks in his jacket pocket. In a fat manila envelope."

Shannon stared across the table before he said, "What else was in the jacket?"

"A couple of papers, travel brochures, not much. Cigarettes—he was a smoker. One after another, like you."

Shannon smiled to himself. The guy was being evasive. What he should do was arrest him where he sat, then put in for whatever reward there was to get. Didn't banks pay ten percent on recovered loot? But aside from his let-live philosophy and his liking for the man, Shannon was something of an adventurer himself. Drunk, he'd stumbled through most of the western states, and thought he'd like to try it sober sometime. Purley excited him, that "alive" quality flowing across the table like heat. He could see him riding the rails and loving it—could see him doing almost anything, a man really cut loose and all charged up.

"What you might do," he said, "is take some money over to Reno and try your luck there, maybe hit a million-dollar jackpot." He could almost see *that* happening with this guy. "I mean a laundering operation, Purley."

"The only thing I ever bet on in my life," Purley said, but with interest in his eyes, "was whether it'd rain or not. And what I bet was a crop. You a gambler?"

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"I take a whirl now and again, yes."

"That how you ended up here? No offense meant, but—"

"No offense taken. No, I ended up here in a bottle, out of the same Midwest you come from. Kansas City. I'm what you might call a recreational gambler—an amateur, with maybe a knack for the game. When I drank, Purley, I was an all-out pro."

"How long you been sober?"

"Two years, three months, eleven days, and maybe seven–eight hours." Shannon grinned. "You always keep track."

"I'm impressed—congratulations. But are you happy here?"

"You mean amidst all this human wreckage? Yeah, oddly enough I am. Or anyway, I feel safe here."

"I don't know what that is any more—safe. I never did know, come to think of it. You got a car, Shannon? How do you get to Reno?"

"Bus. I'm taking one over next Monday morning."

"Why don't we drive? I mean this afternoon. You got a driver's license?"

"Can't use yours, can we? Yeah, I got one."

"Let's go rent us a car."

"You mean live it up, huh?"

"That's what I mean. Or begin to, anyway."

"And while we can," Shannon said. "Or anyway, while *you* can."

Shannon had a king-high straight. There was a pair of twos in the five cards all the players shared, plus the nine, jack, and queen that made up his straight. Not a great hand, but he'd been rolling since he sat down at the Texas Hold-em table and had just raised the maximum six bucks the casino rules allowed. Now he watched the remaining players fold, waited a courteous moment, and pulled in the pot, his fourth in ten games. He was ahead more than three hundred dollars in less than a half hour of play and gloated just a little. But how long would it take to launder a quarter million bucks at that rate? Forever. He smiled all around and got up to leave, only the dealer smiling back.

He found Purley where he'd left him, playing the Megabucks slots in that part of Harrah's you had to go through an alley to get to. Purley standing there as though he'd played the game all his life. But what's to learn? Put your money in the slot and pull the arm—ancient old ladies learn in two seconds, and sometimes die at it. Purley looked fairly decent, not like a fake bum any more. Before renting the car, he'd bought only a slightly used shirt, jacket, and

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pants from a Tenderloin store Shannon himself patronized. On his head was a San Francisco Forty-niner peaked cap pulled low over his eyes. Shannon, watching him, wondered if anyone else was. But, no, people don't watch people here until the bells go off and the sirens wail—*then* there you are, famous for your fifteen minutes, cameras clicking in your face.

What if that happens? Shannon had asked driving over, and Purley said he hoped it did, that he was really through skulking around, that if they nabbed him he had his lines of defense. But it wouldn't happen, would it? Over the bank of slots where Purley played, the big illuminated counter, wired into 32 other casinos all over the state of Nevada, had passed the two-million-dollar mark, the last three digits clicking away as though gone wild. Hundreds of people competing for that mind-boggling prize as Shannon stood there watching. No, it wouldn't happen. How could it?

Shannon went back across the alley and picked out a 21 table that had a vacant seat. Purley had given him five hundred dollars and said that was just for starters.

Nothing like a backer to make you brave, Shannon thought, and bet $50.00 on the first hand, drew an ace-king blackjack, let the $150.00 ride, drew two tens, and watched the dealer go bust. Jesus love us, three hundred bucks in two minutes. It got attention, this bar-girl suddenly at his side—the thing is to get you drunk, or keep you happy, until the odds reassert themselves. He ordered a Coke and the fat lady rooted in the chair on his right, drinking screwdrivers, touched his arm and whispered, "Luck."

Or timing, Shannon thought. Or the evil fruits of crime. Or maybe the fat lady was right. He had a nine up, a three down, and stayed, watched the dealer go bust again in five cards. He had a queen-jack and beat the dealer's ten-nine. He bet five bucks on the next hand and lost to the dealer's blackjack. Then bet the house limit of $200.00 three hands in a row and won them all. Hundred-dollar chips were piling up in front of him. The fat lady was showing him her hole card, asking for advice, but he ignored her. He was having a fit of the shakes—hadn't had one of those for months, but it passed. He concentrated on the cards and the dealer's eyes, shutting out the world, and went on winning, the chips piling up as in a dream. For the next twenty minutes he won ninety percent of the hands, an almost infallible instinct telling him when to bet the limit and when to lay out a chicken five.

The dealer was happy for him, smiling, those guys always secretly

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against the house and alert for the prospects of a tip. The game went on, a crowd gathering behind Shannon. He felt the on-stage pressure, but didn't lose his feel for the cards, the chips piling up in numbers he didn't dare think about. He was playing the game for himself now, not Purley—a lust for big bucks awake in his head again after its long sleep. Other things coming out of hibernation, too—his daughter Elaine glimmering into mind, and *her* daughter Jane, age five when last seen by him through an alcoholic haze, pretty little thing about ready for college now. But the old electrician turned those lights off, like pulling live wires out of a wall, and went on with the game, fortune-building, watching the dealer's eyes, the chips heaping up in front of him.

And then the dealer lost his smile, his narrowed eyes glancing over Shannon's head between deals, mind not on his work, and Shannon knew why even before he heard Purley's big flat mid-western voice saying, "Son, if you think you caught me on TV last night, kindly put the thought away. I've already been through that hassle twice today and don't care to go through it again. I'm just a lookalike to that murderous bastard you got an inkling I could be. Get on with your game—this big winner here's got you upset."

Shannon felt Purley's hand drop on his shoulder and felt the sweat his pores had been too tight to let through begin to flow.

"You leaving us?" the fat lady asked, and Shannon, shoving a fifty-dollar chip over to the dealer, said he thought he would. He would have traded his whole pile for a double shot of rye—and for the first time with Purley, he felt really scared.

"Purley," he said, "we gotta leave here *right now*."

"No," Purley said. "We haven't done what we came to do. How much you got there?"

Shannon had finished counting it, and said, "Thirty-seven-hundred dollars—less than two percent of what we got to put through the wash. It can't be done. How much did you lose at Megabucks?"

"About three thousand."

"See? Damn it, we're up maybe seven hundred on the day. It can't be done."

Purley was rubbing his right shoulder. "Anybody's arm ever drop off in this town? I've got muscles I never heard from before."

"Also, you're too damn free and easy." Shannon was exhausted. He'd gotten caught up in the common Reno dream—get rich quick. And he'd almost reached the first plateau, but now he could have

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laid down on the floor and gone to sleep. "I don't think you sold that dealer," he said. "Or if you sold him, somebody in that crowd didn't buy. Besides, I'm now an accessory after the fact, or whatever they call it. Helping a bank robber launder his ill-gotten gains."

"*Alleged* bank robber. And it was your idea to come here, wasn't it?" Purley, standing big and tall, laughed. "Relax, man—ain't nobody gonna nail ole Purley." He'd been drinking, the free drinks coming at you from all sides in Reno. "I like my new name," he mused. "Purley. Yeah, I like that, it rolls nicely off the tongue."

"Until somebody puts it into print," Shannon groused. "Like some cop on his report sheet. Then what?"

"Then they start the music once again, old friend. Come on, let's go shoot some dice."

"I don't do craps," Shannon protested. "I don't know a damn thing about it."

"So we'll have some beginner's luck," Purley said.

But they didn't. They stood at one crowded noisy craps table until eleven o'clock that night and ended up with less than half the amount they'd left San Francisco with. The game's myriad ways to bet confused Shannon's already wearied head and Purley seemed guided only by impulse—as he had been guided mostly by impulse since killing his boss.

And admitted it. "You can't grow no crops like this," he said.

"You ready to go home?"

"Tail between my legs, you mean."

"We were beat before we got here, Purley, both of us. In the long run, everybody is. Short run, too. Your chance of hitting that Megabucks jackpot was about ten million to one."

"Well, some dog'll hit it, won't he? Why not me?"

"You've had your big money drop, man. You only get one in life."

Purley laughed. "My life's just gettin' underway, Shannon." He yawned, arms thrust in the air, making a big show of himself in the crowded room. "Yeah," he said, "let's go home."

U.S. 80, going over the Sierra on a clear full-moon night like this, presented a scene to behold. Etched mountaintops as far as ten miles away, their snow caps looking like blue-rinsed laundry just hung out to dry, almost no traffic on a road that seemed a quarter mile wide.

"Big world, ain't it?" Purley said.

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For you, maybe, Shannon thought. He was at the wheel again, wide awake and going home. To his small world about four blocks square. For a while back there, playing 21, he'd felt his ties to the Tenderloin loosen, almost break, felt he could even reclaim those two girls of his, so long ago given up. But given up also was his right to them. Twice today he'd wanted a drink so desperately he could've killed for one, and that lure would hang over his head forevermore, like what's-his-name's sword. He could never risk taking that back to them, he didn't have the power. "Last night," he said, wanting to get them off his mind, "the TV man said you'd probably head for a seaport. On account of this son of yours in the merchant marine. Is that why you came to San Francisco?"

"I read somewhere," Purley answered, "that San Francisco's everybody's second town. And when your first town's Corn Corners, Iowa, that's hard to resist."

"That doesn't answer the question, does it? Your kid ship out of San Francisco?"

"Hell, he's been in every port on the map."

"Okay, so that *does* answer the question," Shannon said, "and you're hanging around until he gets in. You been in touch with him, Purley?"

"We write now and again."

"Not lately, though, huh? But maybe he read about you in the *Hong Kong Times*, or some such thing—"

"By George," Purley said, "I hadn't thought of that."

"Jesus Christ," Shannon said, "you're somethin' else. The point I'm trying to make is that the Feds are probably on his trail—or in his wake, if you prefer—right now, as we go dreamily along this road. That doesn't give you pause?"

"Does the eagle pause in his flight?"

Shannon couldn't help grinning at the long empty road ahead. This guy was *truly* something else. Then it occurred to him that they'd just been killing time in Reno. The only money Purley'd brought along for the trip had come from the envelope in Baker's jacket. Purley claimed he hadn't even opened the two cases with the bank loot in storage somewhere. So how are you gonna launder money in storage? Or maybe neither of them understood what laundering money was all about.

Shannon was going to raise the point when a semi came boiling past them on a downgrade doing about 90, and three seconds later

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a C.H.P. black-and-white with dome lights and siren on came whipping along on its tail.

"Would you look at that!" Purley said, awed, and Shannon automatically braked down to 65, not wanting cop trouble with Purley aboard. But on the other hand, what if he just pulled over when the black-and-white got the truck stopped and turned Purley over to the cop? The thought nearly choked him up. But why not? Why not test this bravado attitude Purley wore like a challenge to the world? Surely that hadn't been born just lately, that swagger. He could easily have done all the things they said he did—just look at him!

And what would be in it for him, for Shannon, this about-face, this treachery? A reward, if nothing else. He had read somewhere that banks pay ten percent on stolen money returned. That would be $25,000, all his! He could put Janie through college with money like that. Pick up the *true* threads of his life.

"He got him!" Purley said, straining forward against his shoulder strap. "See—down there. Trucker must've been doin' a hundred and ten, probably some damn Texan, some cowboy. Slow down a little, Shannon."

"I did."

"But don't stop, huh?" Now Purley was looking at him.

"Why would I do a thing like that?" Shannon asked. "I mean at this late date."

"'Cause you've had it in you all along."

"You could smell it, huh?"

"Like attar of dead meat."

"Well, take another sniff," Shannon said as they passed the parked black-and-white. "It's all gone now."

"The thing is," Purley said after a moment, "I really wouldn't blame you."

"Yeah, well, you've been asking for it, man."

"No, not really. Waiting for it, maybe, getting ready for it if it comes. But asking for it? No, I don't want it."

"What do you want?" Shannon said. "No, wait, I'll answer for you—you wanna get on a boat with your kid and sail off to Brazil or someplace. But, Purley, can you really *do* that?"

The summit was well behind them now, the world closing down, Auburn not far ahead. For two miles Purley didn't answer, then he said, "The Feds, I hadn't thought about them. You really think they might be watching the boy?"

"Who else they got to watch besides you?"

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Another mile passed in silence, then Shannon said, "When's he due in?"

"Soon."

That was all, nothing more. Purley's secret, and better left that way. Shannon didn't really want to know, and didn't want to answer Purley's next question, which was, not illogically, "You got kids?"

He was silent for a moment, then spoke quietly, as though it was *his* secret. "One," he said. "A girl—about forty-three now, long ago divorced. And one granddaughter, eighteen or so."

"Where?"

"I—Purley, I don't know. Kansas City, last I heard."

"You don't write?"

"No. Not for years." It hurt him to say that, and Purley was sensitive enough to leave it alone. There's a lot in each of us that should be left alone and Purley knew it. And a lot that you *can't* leave alone—he knew that, too.

"All at once," Purley said, "I'm tired."

"Yeah, well, you been living two lives, man. I can hardly handle one."

"How long we got to go?"

"Two hours, maybe a little more. Why don't you take a nap?"

"With one eye open, huh?"

"Well, that's not a bad idea, Purley. You can't really trust anybody from now on, can you?"

"You I trust, Shannon."

"You shouldn't, man, you never should! Hell, I'm not even sure you didn't do everything they said you did."

"I didn't expect you to be," Purley said, but folded his arms across his chest, dropped his head, and nodded off.

Shannon slept around the clock on Friday and didn't get to see Purley again until Saturday morning around ten. Shannon was drinking coffee at Millie's counter when Purley walked in and sat in his usual booth. He was wearing his Reno clothes, but without the silly-looking Forty-niner cap on all that shaggy hair.

Shannon was just a little bit surprised to see him. When they had turned in the rental car early Friday morning, Purley had insisted he keep what money he had left, which was all Purley's, sort of like a parting gift. But here he was again, as hard to figure out as life itself. Shannon got up, coffee in hand, went across the narrow tile floor, and sat facing him again.

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"I been watching the news," he said, "thinking maybe I'd hear your name mentioned, or actually see your ass get hauled off to the clink, that innocent smile finally wiped off your face."

"You sound disappointed," Purley said.

"No. Just surprised. But I'll keep watching. Your kid's boat come in yet? You said soon."

"Soon means in the near future, and that's sorta like an open end."

"Sure it is," Shannon said. "I suppose if a man's not nabbed within forty-eight hours after appearing on that show, the heat tends to cool down. But you might at least wear dark glasses, for Christ's sake."

Purley laughed. "You've been worried about me, haven't you?"

"*Us,* I been worried about. *Me,* I been worried about. I'm still some sort of accessory after the fact—and damn it, Purley, I'm still not sure about you."

"I knew you weren't, and that's been troubling *me.*" Purley reached in his jacket pocket and brought out a U.S. passport. "The other day," he said, "you almost asked me if Baker had a passport on him when he died. You—"

"Is that it?"

"You figured that if he had a passport on him, then he sure as hell planned to leave the country, like he told me he did. Or at least like I *claimed* he told me. It woulda sorta made my case for me, wouldn't it?"

"Well, it would make it a hell of a lot stronger," Shannon said. He felt a stir of elation and wanted it to grow. "Is that it?" he repeated.

"No, that's mine." Purley was grinning. "That's James J. Purley's." He reached in his pocket again and brought out a second passport. "This one's Baker's," he said, and laid it on the table in front of Shannon.

"You like to play with a man, don't you?" Shannon said, but he felt the elation grow. He was, in fact, tickled as he thumbed through the document, glanced at Baker's picture, and recognized it from the TV show. Then he saw the date of issue. "But it's a year old."

"Means only the man planned ahead," Purley said. "Like I've been doin' lately. Look at mine and you'll see its issue date is four months ago."

"Even though fresh off the press, huh?"

"Picked it up last night," Purley said, "along with a two-year-old

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driver's license. I'm a complete man now, Shannon—everything but a credit card and a lot of time payments to make."

Shannon lit a cigarette and leaned forward over his coffee cup. "No, you're not," he said. "You're a fugitive, pal, and you're even beginning to think like one, like a crook. Purley, what you should do is turn yourself in right now before it goes any further. The money's intact, you got Baker's gun, you got his passport, you—"

"Which I want you to keep for me."

"You what?" Shannon's eyes were wide open.

"Yeah, I mean it."

"No way," Shannon said, shaking his head. Then he said, "Why, for Christ's sake?"

"Well, on accounta I'm—"

"Yeah, I know—on accounta you're this big adventurer now. This soldier of fortune. Let somebody else do the paperwork, keep the books, but you'll carry the hardware and have all the fun."

"Yeah, I'll carry the hardware, keep Baker's gun."

"Purley, damn it, you got a criminal mind."

"Hell, we all got criminal minds, I'm just beginning to use mine, that's all. We all watch TV, don't we? We all know forty different ways to kill and a dozen ways to skin the law. And there must be *two* handguns in this fair land for every living adult. You want me to turn myself in? Shannon, the way the courts work these days, I'd be a broken old man before I got cleared. Besides—" Purley, leaning forward and scowling, now leaned back and grinned.

"Besides what?"

"I like my new life, like I told you. Yeah, I'll have all the fun, if that's what it turns out to be, and why not? For the first time in fifty years I don't have to get up with the cows. Look, for twenty-five years, you told me, you lived in an alcoholic fog. Would you like to go back to that?"

"No."

"Well, I wouldn't like livin' with the cows again."

"You were a bank guard."

"For six months, at four bucks an hour. With an ulcer that hasn't bled since I hit the road. No, thanks. If I have to go back, I will—but until then, no thanks." He leaned forward again. "You won't keep the passport?"

"No, absolutely not. I'm in this damn thing too far as it is."

"Then how about goin' the whole nine yards? How about comin' with me?"

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"*Jesus Christ*, Purley."

"Think about it. You like it here that much?"

"I feel—" Had he told Purley he felt safe here, or had he merely told himself that a thousand times? But it was true. "I feel *safer* here," he said, modifying it a little, and then a little more. "A *lot* safer here than I would on the lam with you. Besides, I'm ten years older than you are."

Purley picked up the passports and put them back in his pocket. He hadn't ordered breakfast and didn't look as though he would. He looked like a man about ready to leave.

"You going now?" Shannon asked, the thought actually pleasing him, like good news from the front. It had been a kind of war to him.

"I came in to talk, not to eat," Purley said. "But I might be back, who knows? Meantime, think about what I said about leaving here. Not with me—that was just to stir you up—but all by yourself. You've got a lot of unlived life yet, friend." He sidled out of the booth and stood up. "Take a chance and go home," he said—and walked out into the street.

Shannon wasn't sorry to see him go. It had been fun, but the man was a load of trouble. That trip to Reno, for instance, had had jail written all over it, and Shannon had been in enough jails to last forever. Overnighters, mostly, but you get a good taste of the life.

Go home, huh? Where's that, if it isn't here? He sighed and slumped in his seat. Comfortable is what I am, he told himself. I'm comfortable here, and how many men can say that?

He took his coffee cup back to the counter, where Millie filled it up again.

In fact, Shannon didn't see Purley again, but kept expecting to, either in the coffee shop or in/on the news. He searched both local papers daily and watched the TV news shows, but there wasn't a word about him. And nobody in the close-mouthed street had seen him. But the big test would come on the Wednesday-night TV show, exactly one week after Purley first appeared in his life. If he'd been caught, those guys would be glad to tell the world.

Shannon watched the show seated tensely on the edge of his bed, thinking, God, what if somebody mentions *me?*

Then, like most dicey moments in life, it came to naught. Two new wanted men shared the show, and one guy, featured a month ago, had been nabbed in New Orleans—another port town. But not a word about Bascom/Purley. Shannon sighed, relieved—good, he

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was through with him now. Fini. He stood up, went down to the street, and walked past a dozen or so bars to Union Square, where he sat and smoked cigarettes for an hour. His own personal patio, he told himself. Who could ask for anything more?

Sunday morning, with Purley fading rapidly into Shannon's past, Millie shoved a packet across the coffee-shop counter and said, "Your friend you been looking for asked me to give this to you today. He said to wait until Sunday. He said Sunday's the Lord's day—although what the Lord's got to do with you, Shannon, I don't know."

"When?" Shannon said. He was shaken. "When did he give it to you?"

"Last Monday, before you got your lazy butt outa bed. You gonna open it?"

It was a mailer, a padded manila envelope about four by eight and sealed every which way with scotch tape. The passport, Shannon thought, and pressed a finger on the packet, felt it give, then snapped his finger away. He didn't dare think it was money.

"You gonna open it, or what?" Millie said.

Shannon didn't want to. He said the first thing that came to mind. "It's a paperback book. He said he had one he wanted me to read."

"Sealed up like that?" Millie was hard to lie to, an old Tenderloin hand.

"What did he give you," Shannon said, "when he asked you to hold this for me?"

"*Give* me? Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"You heard me." Millie walked her coffee pot to the single other customer at the counter and topped off his cup. When she came back she had a pair of scissors in her hand. "Open it," she said.

Shannon lit a cigarette with a hand that shook.

"You want me to?"

No, he didn't want her to—but what could he do?

Millie clipped a quarter inch off the flap end of the mailer and shoved it over to him. He put his cigarette in a tray and took it up with both hands, which even then shook. He hated it when he had the shakes. It had been a while. He would like a drink—hell, he would *love* a drink, he *needed* a drink. There were three business-size envelopes in the mailer—two thin, one thick. Shannon handed the mailer back to Millie. "You look."

Millie pulled the top envelope out and her eyes went wide. "Hey,

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it's for me!" She showed Shannon her name block-printed where an address would go. She began to blush.

"Open it," Shannon said, and pawed the mailer back to his side of the counter.

"My God!" Millie said, her face growing rosy-red. She held up two bank-fresh hundred-dollar bills.

Shannon wasn't surprised, but he was getting sick, a ball of nausea growing in his belly. He slipped out the second thin envelope and knew what was in it before he got it open—an American Airlines ticket to Kansas City, one way. He didn't show it to Millie, who was still gaping at the bills in her hand. He put it in his jacket pocket and pulled the third envelope, the thick one, from the mailer and let it lay on the counter. Like the second one, it had his name on it. Purley had a big clean style of block-printing—Purley playing God, telling him how to run his life, as Shannon had told Purley how to run his. Turnabout, but not fair play—the guy on a boat somewhere out of reach.

Millie had walked up to the front of the counter to put her hundred-dollar bills in the cash register, under the tray. Shannon watched her, wondering how she'd react if he stumbled in here drunk as a hooty-owl one day—like maybe tomorrow. He knew he had another one in him, like a slowly ticking bomb, but knew precisely what she'd do when it went off. He'd seen it a hundred times—she'd call him a damn fool and then fill him up with coffee. Who else would do that when the time came?

Millie was back in front of him—smiling, but settled down. "Gimme your pencil," he said.

"Huh?" she said. "What for?"

"Just give it to me, okay?"

She handed it over and Shannon scratched through his name on the thick envelope and wrote hers in: MILLIE.

One day last summer a local drunk won $8,500.00 in the state lottery, threw a month-long binge for his pals, and then dove off the Golden Gate Bridge, victim number nine hundred and something. You have to be careful who you dump big bucks on. You don't do it to guys like Shannon, who knew it well. And now he stood up.

"Ever since I've known you," he said, "you've been bitching about needing a new kitchen." He picked up his cigarette from the tray and took a big drag, feeling less sick, a decision made. "Now unless I miss my guess, Mill, you can have one. That's yours."

"Shannon!"

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He'd started away, but turned back. "Let's just say you've been saving it up all this time. And tell whatever contractor you get to do the job that *I'll* do the wiring—okay?"

"Shannon!" she said again, but he'd gone.

Five minutes later, a beat cop walked through the door. His nameplate said he was J. R. Smith, and he was big. He'd been in before just to say hello, and he said it again, but now he had a business look in his steely blue eyes. He had all the usual gear draped on his burly frame—gun, baton, walkie-talkie, cuffs—and, this time, a picture in his hand.

Millie was still at the counter, the thick envelope untouched before her, her mind still churning away. She looked up to return his greeting, putting on her Tenderloin face: bland, nothing there. "Coffee?" she said.

"No, thanks, Millie," he said, first-naming her the way they do. "You seen this guy around?" He handed her the picture.

"Looks like just another bum," she said. "What'd he do?"

"Killed two people, robbed a bank. You seen him? We got a report he was in the neighborhood, maybe even in here."

"What I do," Millie told him, "I look at a guy's money, not his face."

"Like if his money's good," the cop said, "he's got no face, huh, Mill?"

"Like that, yes."

"Look, he killed two people, robbed this bank."

"Those aren't killer eyes," Millie said flatly, and handed the picture back. "But you shouldn't be asking me this stuff—you should be asking people like Shannon there who just walked out—street guys."

"I did ask him."

"And?"

The cop grinned wryly, a veteran cop's grin. "He told me in about four different ways that he hadn't seen him."

"Where one would've been enough, huh?" Millie smiled, feeling good, her mind clearing up. "Well, that's the Irish for you—big talkers."

The cop sighed. "Yeah, well, listen, I think I will have that coffee, Mill."

"Sure," she said. "Any time."

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included in the next issue please send order and remittance to I. M. Bozoki, Classified Ad Manager, DAVIS PUBLICATIONS, INC., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

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Classified Continued

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PERSONAL—Cont'd

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ELLERY QUEEN

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING ORDER FORM

Send to **ELLERY QUEEN MAGAZINE**
Classified Advertising Department Suite 1401
380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017

15 WORD MINIMUM
Only $48.00 for 15 Words or Less
$3.20 each additional word
Capitalized words add—40¢ per word
SAVE 15% WITH 3 CONSECUTIVE MONTHS SAME COPY ORDER

DEADLINE: Copy and payment must be in by the 5th day of the third preceding month for issue in which ad is to appear.

____ Words at $3.20 each $ ____
____ Capitalized word at 40¢ each ____
Total amount for 1 ad $ ____
15% Savings with 3 Consecutive Months Discount
(a) Multiply one ad total $____ x 3 = $ ____
(b) Multiply total amount on above line by .85 x .85
(c) Total amount for 3 ads $ ____
(Example: One 15 word ad $48.00 x 3 months $144.00 x .85 = $122.40)

(PLEASE PRINT OR TYPE)

YOUR NAME _____

FIRM (NAME IN AD) _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ **STATE** _____ **ZIP** _____

PHONE: _____ **DATE:** _____

YOUR SIGNATURE _____

$____ is enclosed for ____ insertions in the ____ issue(s) ____ Heading

(FOR ADDITIONAL WORDS ATTACH SEPARATE SHEET)

(1) **$48.00**	(2) **$48.00**	(3) **$48.00**	(4) **$48.00**	(5) **$48.00**
(6) **$48.00**	(7) **$48.00**	(8) **$48.00**	(9) **$48.00**	(10) **$48.00**
(11) **$48.00**	(12) **$48.00**	(13) **$48.00**	(14) **$48.00**	(15) **$48.00**
(16) **$51.20**	(17) **$54.40**	(18) **$57.60**	(19) **$60.80**	(20) **$64.00**
(21) **$67.20**	(22) **$70.40**	(23) **$73.60**	(24) **$76.80**	(25) **$80.00**
(26) **$83.20**	(27) **$86.40**	(28) **$89.60**	(29) **$92.80**	(30) **$96.00**

HOW TO COUNT WORDS: Name and address must be included in counting the number of Words in your ad. Each initial or number counts as 1 word. Mark Holly, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017 = 8 WORDS. Zip codes are not counted. Phone # = 2 Words. Symbols used as keys are charged for. City or State count as 1 word each. Garden City, New York = 2 words. Abbreviations such as C.O.D., F.O.B., P.O., U.S.A., 2x10, 35mm count as 1 word. (P.O. Box 145 count as 3 words.) Webster's International Unabridged Dictionary will be used as our authority for spelling, compound words, hyphens, abbreviations, etc. **Please make checks payable to ELLERY QUEEN MAGAZINE.**

NEXT ISSUE...

11 *NEW* stories—including

PETER LOVESEY (about an evaluation)

EDWARD D. HOCH (about Captain Leopold's birthday)

MALCOLM GRAY (about Miss Crindle)

WILLIAM BANKIER (about art forgeries)

KEITH PETERSON (about John Wells)

plus 2 distinguished reprints by JOY WILLIAMS and ELLIS PETERS

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MAIL ★ ORDER ★ MALL

▼ OUR EXCLUSIVE MAIL-ORDER INTRODUCTION

It's a toss-up as to whether it's kids or parents who are happiest with this very special Child's Chair. From the tyke's point of view, it's great because it pulls right up to a real table (fits under standard dining tables of 27¼" or higher). Children can feel part of family meals when not relegated to a highchair, plus a table is better than that little tray for food plus the requisite toys. Older toddlers *are particularly pleased with what resembles a "grown-up"* chair. Adults love the quality — American-made of solid ¾" oak, double-lacquered for protection, plus the safety features — all edges rounded, all screws recessed, polypropylene straps attached with screws and washers. Designed for durability (nylon gliders instead of casters that fall off; no upholstery to replace), it's been extensively tested in restaurants, where there's more abuse than even *your* kids can dish out. Since there's nothing like a highchair for spoiling your decor the very best feature may be the handsome styling. 18"x20" at base. **$85.98** ($10.00) #A1792.

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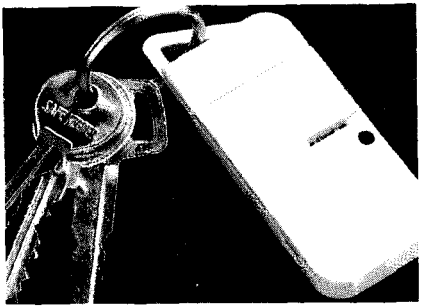
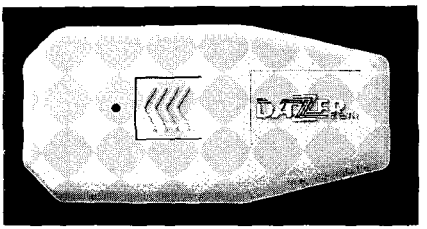
▼ EASY KEY FINDER



Keys are misplaced more often than any other modern essential. Now thanks to our easy key finder your keys can tell you where you put them. Clap your hands 4 times and it will chirp electronically. Works up to 30' away. Special hybrid microchip design requires no on/off switch (other units need you to turn them ON before you lose your keys). This unit has a high-impact plastic case; weighs a mere ½oz; comes with its own key ring; measures only 2½"x1 1/8"x3/8". Batteries and a 30-day manufacturer's warranty are included. **$13.98** ($3.00) #A1889; two units, **$23.98** ($4.00) #A1890.

▼ HELPFUL TO HUMANS HARMLESS TO DOGS



Even the most dedicated canine aficionado can sometimes encounter unfriendly dogs. Dazer™ provides a humane way to repel their advance, emitting ultrasonic sound waves inaudible to humans and totally safe for dogs (unlike mace and other common deterrents). Pocket size (4¾" long) plastic case can also clip on belt; takes 1-9V battery, included. For joggers, hikers, bikers, seniors and kids—plus the proverbial postman. **$29.98**, ($3.00) #A1829X.

▼ YES, IT DOES WINDOWS — IN HALF THE TIME

Do we exaggerate? Actually, it may take *less* than half the time you'd normally spend assembling, toting and juggling bottles or buckets, rags, a hose, a stepstool. Spray & Wipe™ combines in one implement an ample reservoir for your cleaning fluid, a spray trigger at the base and adjustable mist-to-spray head at top, plus a squeegee. At 34" long, it eliminates much climbing; is lightweight but sturdy for firm leverage on the squeegee; swivel head reaches angles. Think patio doors, shower stalls, boats, campers, windshields, et al. **$15.98** ($4.00) #A1865X.

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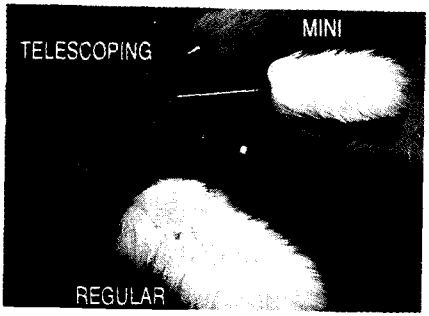
MAIL ★ ORDER ★ MAIL

▼ YOGURT CHEESE FUNNEL & RECIPE BOOK

In less than a minute, you can make the newest, healthiest most economical spread — just spoon plain yogurt into this woven plastic funnel, place in the frig, in 8-14 hrs. you have really creamy cheese. Using 1½% milkfat yogurt, it has 90% less fat, ⅔ calories but over twice the calcium of commercial cream cheese. Yet most people including avowed yogurt haters can't tell the difference! Use the 142 page recipe book included or substitute for cream cheese, mayonnaise, or sour cream in your favorite recipes. Funnel holds up to 16oz. Makes about 8oz. of yogurt cheese. Our set provides 142 page recipe book, 1 funnel, you'll have enough for the lemon cheesecake shown above — scrumptious and a mere 125 calories. **$26.98** ($5.00) #A1892.

▼ DUST MAGNETS



Lambswool contains a natural static charge that makes dust literally leap off surfaces. Our dusters are imported from England. They are the fluffiest, highest quality lambswool in the world! We offer a set of four lambswool dusters: our 27" duster, our telescoping duster which extends to more than four feet — lets you reach high corners, top shelves, overhead lights and collapses to 28", and two mini dusters for extra fragile objects. **$22.98** ($4.00) #A1870.

▼ GOOD NATURED GRATER

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